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FOREWORDS

to the Offprint of Prof. Manly's Chapter on "*Piers the Plowman* and its Sequence" in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. ii, pp. 1–42, A.D. 1908.

PAGE

1. Statement by Dr. Furnivall iii
2. Prof. Manly's Article on "The Lost Leaf of 'Piers the Plowman,'" from *Modern Philology*, January, 1906 . . . viii
3. Dr. Henry Bradley's Letter on "The Misplaced Leaf of 'Piers the Plowman,'" from *The Athenæum*, April 21, 1906 . . xiv

260
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Prof. Manly's discovery of the multiple authorship of *Piers Plowman* is, to me, the best thing done in my time at Early English. Henry Bradshaw's lift up to the Man of Law of the Tales forming the rest of Group B of the Canterbury Tales, Nicholson's proof of the humbug of the genuineness and reputed authorship of Mandeville's Travels, Henry Bradley's setting right the run of the *Testament of Love*, and his demonstration that Thomas Usk was the author of it, are the most memorable events in our section of study since I began work in 1861. But I set Manly's achievement above them, because of the greater importance of the Plowman's Vision for the student of Literature and Social England, and because the Chicago Professor for the first time clears away from the poet of the A version the tangential strayings and confusions of the author of the B revision, and the rewritings, changes, differences of opinion, and spurious biographical details introduced by the writer of the C version, and leaves us a poet more worthy of being Chaucer's contemporary and ally than we had thought possible.

That some folk hesitate to accept all Manly's conclusions is not matter for wonder, because they haven't yet graspt the most incontestable point brought forward by him in *Modern Philology*, Jan. 1906, and confirmd and commented on by our chief English seer in these matters, Henry Bradley, in the *Athenæum* of 21 April, 1906.[1]

Manly showd that not only was there a gap in the A text, which included the whole of the confession of Wrath (and perhaps the conclusion of the confession of Envy), but also that in some way some lines had been joined to the confession of Sloth which were strangely out of character.[2] He proposed to account for both difficulties by supposing that the two halves of a double leaf had in some way been lost from the original MS., one half containing the confession of Wrath (and, perhaps, the end of Envy), and the other containing a passage of about 62 lines separating what is left of the confession of Sloth from the passage concerning the restitution of ill-gotten gains which is now confused with it. Henry Bradley, while agreeing as to the loss and confusion, offerd another explanation of the matter, which he, and I also, regard as more satisfactory. This was, that when dealing with two of the Seven Deadly Sins, Avarice and

[1] See these articles below, pp. vii–xvi.

[2] Bradley holds, and I agree with him, that these Sloth lines apply and belong to Avarice.

Sloth, the scribe of A copied a page of his original in its wrong order, and left out of Avarice 24 lines which were part of it, and made them part of Sloth; and that when the author of B revised this wrong version of Sloth, he faild to see the scribe's mistake, and not only treated the erroneously placed lines in their wrong position, as in their right one, but put-in some fresh lines to justify their wrongness.[1] (The C-man set this mistake right.)

Not content with this first blunder, the copier of A made a second, as stated by Manly on p. 33 of the Cambr. Hist., vol. ii. When Piers made his Will, and after leaving his soul to God, and his body to the Church, the author of A wrote

" Mi wyf schal haue that I won · with treuthe, and no more, 89
And dele among my frendes · and my deore children," 90

and added—no doubt at the top or bottom of the page, with a tick to show where the lines ought to come in,—

" ' Dame Werche-whon tyme is ' · hette Pers wyf; (71) 91
His douhter hette ' Do-riht-so- · or-thi-dame-wol-the-bete ': 92
His sone hette ' Soffre-thi-sovereyns- · for-to-han-heor-wille- 93
' And-deeme-hem-not; for,-yif thou-do-, · thou-schalt-hit-deore-abugge.' " 94

But A's scribe, careless or idiotic, instead of putting these four lines where A meant em to go, after the Will's mention of Piers's wife and children, copied and shovd them into a place 16 lines earlier, where they've nothing to do with what came before or after them. And both the B and C men, when revising and enlarging A's miscopied text, were unable to see that the above four lines were misplaced, and left them standing in the scribe's blunderd position.

Now this was absolutely impossible if the author of A had been the B or C reviser of his own work. Had he been so, he would of course have said what any of us would say in a like case now: " Why, the careless dog has copied my 24 Avarice lines, completing my treatment of the Sin, as part of my Sloth, with which they've nothing whatever to do, and has lifted my 4 lines, added to my Will, into a place where only a fool could put em; and of course I'll shift both sets of lines in my revisions, back to their right place." But this is just what the B-writer didn't do, tho C did correct the Avarice blunder, in clumsy fashion.

It is thus incontestably certain that the B and C revisers and enlargers of the A version of the poem, were not the men who wrote that version, but

[1] The difference between Bradley and Manly is only as to how the blunder of A's scribe—discoverd by Manly—arose, and whether the misplaced lines were meant by A for Avarice, or not.

wholly different persons. It was not possible for the A-man, when making elaborate revisions of his poem, and greatly enlarging it, to be so stupid or so careless as not only to pass over such blunders as his first scribe had made, but to attempt to justify the first of them, and thus trebly make a fool of himself.

If, then, the student will start with this sure fact in his mind, that the B and C men couldn't possibly have been the A one, he will find no difficulty in giving their due value to Prof. Manly's arguments, and accepting them. But he will join me in earnestly urging Prof. Manly to write his full book on Piers Plowman, and show what we can believe as to its several authors' lives.

I give hearty thanks to my friend Prof. Manly, to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, and to my friends Dr. A. W. Ward and Mr. A. R. Waller, the Editors of *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, for their leave to have 500 copies of this Offprint from vol. ii of the *History*, for the Members of the Early English Text Society.

No copies will be on sale to the public. The *History* is such an improvement on its predecessors, and is publisht at such a moderate price, that every student who can possibly afford it, ought to buy it.

F. J. FURNIVALL.

Southwold, Aug. 27, 1908. Revised in Nov.

To save our Members the trouble of referring to the volumes of *Piers Plowman*, I reprint, from Skeat's text, the Avarice and Sloth lines referd to above.

This is how the author of A originally wrote the end of his *Avarice:*

Bot I swere nou sothely · that sunne wol I lete, [*Skeat, p.* 149.] 142
And neuer wikkedliche weye · ne fals chaffare vsen
Bote weende to Walsyngham · and my wyf alse,
And bidde the rode of Bromholm · bringe me out of dette. 145
*And ȝit I-chulle ȝelden aȝeyn · ȝif I so much haue, (236) 146
Al that I wikkedliche won · seththe I wit hade. [* *Here begins the shifted passage.*]
"And thauh my lyflode lakke · letten I nulle
That vche mon schal habben his · er ich henne wende;
[1]And with the residue and the remenaunt · (bi the rode of Chester!), (240) 150
I schal seche seynt Treuthe · er I seo Rome!"[1]

[1—1] The lines are perhaps spurious. See vii. 93–4, at the end of Piers's Will:—
And with the Residue and the Remenaunt · by the Rode of Chestre,
I wol worschupe therwith · Treuthe in my lyue.—Hy. Bradley.

Robert the robbour · on *Reddite*[1] he lokede,
And, for ther nas not wher-with · he wepte ful sore.
But ȝit the sunfol schrewe · seide to him-seluen: 154
"Crist, that vppon Caluarie · on the cros diȝedest,
Tho Dismas my brother · bi-souȝte the of grace,
And heddest merci of that mon · for *memento* sake,
Thi wille worth vppon me · as ich haue wel deseruet (248) 158
To haue helle for euere · ȝif that hope neore.
So rewe on me, Robert · that no red haue,
Ne neuere weene to wynne · for craft that I knowe.
Bote for thi muchel merci · mitigacion I be-seche; (252) 162
Dampne me not on domes day · for I dude so ill."
Ak what fel of this feloun · I con not fẽire schewe,
But wel ich wot he wepte faste · watur with his eiȝen,
And knouhlechede his gult · to Crist ȝit eft-sones, (256) 166
That *Penitencia* is pike · he schulde polissche newe,
And lepe with him ouerlond · al his lyf-tyme,
For he hath leiȝen by *Latro* · Lucifers brother. 169

But the lines 146–169, which complete *Avarice*, were on a separate leaf, and were mistakingly copied by the scribe of A as part of *Sloth*, who had nothing to do with him.

When the B-man took to revising and enlarging A, he faild to see the mistake which the A scribe had made, though he did feel that some lines were needed to justify the sudden plumping of Avarice's bit about 'Robert the robber' into the incongruous Sloth. So he put into his jointly-blunderd Sloth-Avarice the following lines, and evidently thought he had made the thing all right:—

ȝif I bigge and borwe it · but ȝif it be ytailled, 429 B,
I forgete it as ȝerne · and ȝif men me it axe *Skeat, p. 168.*
Sixe sithes or seuene · I forsake it with othes;
And thus tene I trewe men · ten hundreth tymes. 432
And my seruauntȝ some tyme · her salarye is bihynde;
Reuthe is to here the rekenynge · whan we shal rede acomptes;
So with wikked wille and wraththe · my werkmen I p̃aye. 435

When the C-man took to revising A and B, he saw the mistakes of the A-scribe and the B-man, and he restord the misplaced *Avarice* lines of A to their right sequence. But he evidently didn't realize that A's *Reddite*,

[1] The text, '*Reddite ergo omnibus debita*,' Rom. xiii. 7.—Skeat. Render to all their dues.—*Auth. Vers.*

on which Robert the Robber lookt, and which B kept, was the text *Reddite ergo omnibus debita*, Romans xiii. 7; and he said to himself, "Why, if Robert lookt on *Reddite*, *Reddite* must be a man. So I'll make him a Welshman, and instead of B's Sloth words in l. 463, "And ȝete wil I," I'll insert a line and a third, and then wind up with two fresh lines after his l. 466—which are put in square brackets below[1]—

[Then was ther a Walishman · was wonderliche sory; C 307
He highte 'ȝyuan] ȝeld-aȝeyn · if-ich-so-moche haue, B 463
'Al þat ich wickedlich wan · sytthen ich wit hadde:
'And thauh my liflode lacke · leten ich nelle, C 312
'That ech man schal haue hus · er ich hennes wende. B 466
['For me ys leuere in this lif · as a lorel beggen, C 314
'Than in lysse to lyue · and lese lyf and soule.' "]

And no doubt the C-man thought he too 'had made the thing all right.' In fact, so ingenious is C's work that my clever friend Dr. Jusserand is certain that no one but the A-man could have done it. I needn't say that Prof. Manly, Dr. Hy. Bradley and I don't agree with him, specially as C left the 4 Will-added lines in their wrong place.

One more point I should mention. Besides the misplaced leaf of A's *Avarice*, one or more other leaves, containing the end of *Envy* and whole of *Wrath*, was or were lost, so that they are wanting in all the extant MSS. of A. One or more leaves, containing the end of Sloth, may also have been lost.

In his revision of the work, the B-man completed *Avarice* and *Sloth*, and wrote a fresh *Wrath*. But instead of the powerful lines in which we who believe in A are convinst that he would have embodied his view of the fierce *Wrath*, the B-man makes him a friar, the convent's gardener, who promotes lying, gets folk to confess to friars instead of parsons, and makes friars and parsons despise one another. Wrath is an Abbess's nephew, and spreads scandalous lies about the nuns and monks, till they call each other liars, and fight. Among the monks he tells tales, and is flogd, and fed on spare diet; but he tells every one all the evil that he knows of every monk in the cloister. As a sketch of Wrath's doings, B's production is as feeble as it well can be; and it cannot, with any probability or fairness, be set down to A. The C-man strengthens it with a short fight between two women who call one another Whore; but even then, it is a poor thing, quite unworthy of A.

British Museum, Oct. 1, 1908. Revised in Nov.

[1] Manly and Bradley think the suggestion to make a Welshman came from B's line 463 (ȝeld-aȝeyn), rather than from any misunderstanding of *Reddite*.

THE LOST LEAF OF 'PIERS THE PLOWMAN,' BY PROF. MANLY.

SUMMER before last, in the enforced leisure of a long convalescence, I reread *Piers the Plowman*, or perhaps I had better say, read it for the first time; for, although I had more than once read the first seven passus of the B-Text and various other parts of the poem, I had never before read the whole of all three texts in such a way as to get any real sense of the relations of the versions to one another. Fortunately, I did not at that time possess a copy of Professor Skeat's two-volume edition, and consequently was obliged to use the edition which he published for the Early English Text Society. Thus I read each version separately and obtained a definite sense of its style and characteristics. Before the reading was completed, I found myself obliged to question very seriously the current view in regard to the relations of the three versions. The problems became so interesting that I devoted myself to a serious and careful study of them, with the aid of all the available apparatus, and have made them the subject of two courses with my students, who have given me useful suggestions and much help.

Every sort of investigation to which the versions have been subjected has resulted in confirming my original suspicions, and, indeed, in changing them from suspicions into certainties. I am now prepared, I think, to prove that the three versions are not the work of one and the same man, but each is the work of a separate and distinct author; that of the A-Text only the first eight passus are the work of the first author, the principal part of the vision of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest having been added by another author; and that not only lines 101–112 of Passus XII in MS. Rawl. Poet. 137 are the work of Johan But, but that he is responsible for a considerable portion of that passus, probably for at least one-half of it. These conclusions, if accepted, of course entirely destroy the personality built up for the author, mainly from details given only in the C-Text, on the theory that all parts of all three versions are by the same hand; and, indeed, make it doubtful, as I shall try to show, whether the autobiographical details were intended, even by the author of C, to be taken as genuine traits of the author himself instead of attributes of the dreamer—that is to say, whether the dreamer is not as much a fictional character as any of the other figures which participate in the dream. I shall try to support these conclusions by differences in language, differences in versification, differences in the use and in the kind of figurative language, and above all by such striking differences in the mental powers and qualities of the authors as make it highly improbable that they can be one and the same person; and I shall point out such misunderstandings on the part of each of the later authors of passages expanded

by him as seem to me to change the probabilities derived from the other kinds of evidence into certainties. It will appear further, I think, that the merits of the A-Text have been seriously underestimated, and that it is in reality not merely artistically the best of the three, but is in unity of structure, vividness of conception, and skill of versification, on a level with the best work of the fourteenth century, including Chaucer's.

The materials supporting these conclusions are now well in hand, but I shall not be able to put them into form for publication until the advent of my vacation, which will occur in the coming spring. I feel confident that I can then fill out this outline and justify the promises herein made. I make this announcement now in order that other scholars may investigate the problems and be ready to pass a critical judgment upon my results when they appear. I am aware that this will prevent the book from creating any sensation when it appears, but it is of less consequence that the book should make a sensation than that the problems should be subjected to a long and critical investigation by more than one person. Meanwhile, I offer for consideration the investigation of a small problem which easily detaches itself from the general argument, although, as will be seen, it contributes something to it.

In the A-Text, the whole of Passus V is devoted to the effects of the preaching of Conscience upon the "field full of folk." Repentance comes to them, and they confess their sins and promise amendment. The chief penitents are the personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins. The last of these personifications is Sloth. The passage concerning him begins with l. 222, and it is this passage, with the lines immediately following, to which I invite your attention.

¶ Sleuþe for serwe · fel doun I-swowene
Til *vigilate* þe veil · fette water at his eiȝen,
And flatte on his face · and faste on him criȝede,
And seide, "war þe for wonhope · þat Wol þe bi-traye.
¶ 'Icham sori for my sunnes' · sei to þi-seluen,
And bet þi-self on þe Breste · and bidde god of grace,
For nis no gult her so gret · his Merci nis wel more."
¶ Þenne sat sleuþe vp · and sikide sore,
And made a-vou bi-fore god · for his foule sleuþe;
"Schal no sonenday þis seuen ȝer · (bote seknesse hit mäke),
Þat I ne schal do me ar day · to þe deore churche,
And here Matins and Masse · as I a Monk were.
¶ Schal non ale after mete · holde me þennes,
Til ichaue Euensong herd · I beo-hote to þe Rode.

And ȝit I-chulle ȝelden aȝeyn · ȝif I so muche haue,
Al þat I wikkedliche won · seþþe I wit hade. 237
¶ And þauh my lyflode lakke · letten I nulle
þat vche mon schal habben his · er ich henne wende:
And with þe Residue and þe remenaunt · bi þe Rode of Chester!)
I schal seche seynt Treuþe · er I seo Rome!"
¶ Robert þe Robbour · on *Reddite* he lokede,
And for þer nas not Wher-with · he wepte ful sore.
And ȝit þe sunfol schrewe · seide to him-seluen: 244
" Crist, þat vppon Caluarie · on þe Cros diȝedest,
þo Dismas my broþer · bi-souȝte þe of grace,
And heddest Merci of þat mon · for *Memento* sake,
þi wille worþ vppon me · as Ich haue wel deseruet'
To haue helle for euere · ȝif þat hope neore. 249
So rewe on me, Robert · þat no Red haue,
Ne neuere ween to wynne · for Craft þat I knowe.
Bote for þi muchel Merci · mitigacion I be-seche;
Dampne me not on domes day · for I dude so ille."
¶ Ak what fel of þis Feloun · I con not feire schewe,
But wel Ich wot he wepte faste · watur with his eiȝen,
And knouhlechede his gult · to Crist ȝit eft-sones, 256
þat *Penitencia* his pike he schulde polissche newe,
And lepe with him ouerlond · al his lyf tyme,
For he haþ leiȝen bi *latro* · lucifers brother.

It will be observed at once, that while ll. 222–35 are thoroughly appropriate to Sloth, ll. 236–41 are entirely out of harmony with his character, and could never have been assigned to him by so careful an artist as A, who in no single instance assigns to any character either words or actions not clearly and strictly appropriate. Careful consideration of the passage and comparison of it and ll. 242–59 with ll. 222–35, will convince everyone, I believe, that ll. 236–41 really belong to Robert the Robber, and are a part either of his confession, or of a confession suggested to him by someone else (cf. ll. 226–28). Robert the Robber, it will be seen, decides to make restitution of his ill-gotten wealth, or is urged to make such a decision, but, on looking for the goods with which to make repayment, is unable to find any, and is obliged to cast himself wholly and entirely upon the mercy of God. Is it not clear, then, that there is really a lacuna between l. 235 and l. 236; and evidently not a gap of one or two lines, such as might occur in consequence of the eye of the scribe catching up the wrong word and skipping a few lines? The query naturally suggested is: "May not a whole leaf of

the MS. have been lost?" This would make a gap of many lines, sufficient for the development of the confession of Robert the Robber upon some such scale as those of Envy, ll. 59–106, Covetousness, ll. 107–45, Gluttony, ll. 146–221; for a transition, if any be necessary, from these personified abstractions to the concrete figure of the Robber; and also for a less abrupt ending of the confession of Sloth. Many of the MSS. measure $8\frac{1}{2} \times 6$ inches, or thereabouts (see Skeat's descriptions in the prefaces to the E. E. T. S. ed.); MS. L has *c.* 40 lines to a page, R has *c.* 31, W measures $11\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, but is "in a large hand," Y has *c.* 37, O has *c.* 40, C_2 has *c.* 37, I has *c.* 31, F has *c.* 37, S ranges from 33 to 44, K has *c.* 34, Douce 104 has 34 or 35, Hl. 2376 has *c.* 37, Roy. B. xvii has *c.* 38; of the MSS. of the A-Text, U has *c.* 33 (or, according to another statement, *c.* 28), D. has *c.* 31, Trin. Dub. 4. 12 has *c.* 30. Of course there were also MSS. much larger than these,[1] but it seems not improbable that the page of the original may have contained between 30 and 40, and consequently that the lost leaf may have contained between 60 and 80 lines.

But if the leaf was lost, it must have been missing in the original of all the extant MSS. of the A-Text, for all of them contain the passage under discussion in precisely the same form, except for insignificant variations in spelling, etc. It is easy enough to understand how the copyists were undisturbed by the sense (or nonsense) of the passage, but it is not easy to see how the torn remnant of this half-sheet could have entirely escaped attention, if there were any such remnant; and if there was none, the other half of the sheet also would pretty certainly have disappeared very soon. This is precisely what I think occurred.

It has long been pointed out as a curious feature of the vision of the Seven Deadly Sins in this passus that the sin of Wrath is entirely overlooked and omitted. It is incredible that any mediæval author writing specifically on such a topic and dealing with it at such length[2] could have forgotten or overlooked any of these well known categories; and it is especially

[1] MS. V has a very large page, containing two columns of 80 lines each; the Lincoln's Inn MS., written about 1450, has 52, 53 lines to a page; MS. T runs from 42 to 46; H and Hl. 3954 have 40 each.

[2] Wrath is also omitted in the feoffment in A II, 60–74, where the intention is clearly to give to False and Meed all the territories of the Seven Deadly Sins; but the loss involved is one of one line only, which may easily have been omitted in the original of all the extant MSS. In Skeat's text, l. 64, Lechery is also omitted; but the readings of four of the MSS. show that MS. V has merely omitted the words "of leccherie"—the only other MS. recorded in the textual note has the correct reading, but it is inserted in a later hand, this line as well as the preceding having been inadvertently omitted. It may be remarked that the author of the B-Text failed to observe the simple and systematic nature of this feoffment (perhaps because of the omission of Wrath), and consequently, in expanding it, entirely obliterated the original intention. This is only one of many instances to be cited in favour of my main thesis.

impossible to ascribe such an omission to an author whose work shows the firmness and mastery of structure exhibited in A. Let us, then, inquire whether the same accident that caused the confusion in regard to the confession of Sloth may not have caused the total loss of the confession of Wrath.

Comparison of the order of the Sins in A II, 60 ff. (and the corresponding passages in B and C) with A V, 45–235, B V, 63 ff.; C VII, 14 ff. will indicate that the proper place for Wrath in this passage is immediately after Envy. This is indeed the usual order, and Chaucer, following Peraldus,[1] says: "After Envye wol I discryven the sinne of Ire. For soothly, whoso hath envye upon his neighebor, anon he wole comunly finde him a matere of wratthe."[2] The place for Wrath in Passus V is therefore between l. 106 and l. 107. Between this point and ll. 235, 236, where the confusion in regard to Sloth occurs, there are 129 lines. Now it is clear that, if the two leaves of a sheet are gone, as we suppose, the gaps will be separated by four pages, or a multiple of four.[3] In the present instance the distance between the gaps makes about four pages of the size discussed above, and the lost double leaf was, therefore, the next to the innermóst of a section or gathering. We might leave the matter here, but a little further inquiry will determine the precise number of lines to the page in the MS., and incidentally confirm our reasoning. The number of lines between the gaps is in Skeat's edition 129, as I have said; but l. 182 is in H only, and as Skeat suspects, is spurious, "being partly imitated from l. 177;" furthermore, ll. 202–7 are found in U only, and the first word of l. 208 shows that they are spurious, and that l. 208 should immediately follow l. 201. Seven lines must therefore be deducted from 129 to ascertain the number lying between the two gaps in the original. This will give us 122 lines, or two less than four pages of 31 each. As the number of lines to a page is never absolutely constant (Skeat finds it necessary to attach a *circa* to every statement of this kind), this would seem entirely satisfactory; but if space of one line was left between Covetousness and Gluttony, and between Gluttony and Sloth, the whole 124 would be exactly accounted for.[4]

Confirmation of this argument may perhaps be found in a circumstance pointed out to me by Mr. T. A. Knott, one of my students. He calls attention to the abruptness of the close of the confession of Envy, which has, of

[1] K. O. Petersen, *The Sources of the Parson's Tale*, p. 49.

[2] *P. T.*, § 32, v. 533.

[3] Of course the two gaps would make only one if the lost double leaf were the middle one of a section or gathering.

[4] Clearly there were no headings, as in some MSS. of B and C, for none of the MSS. descended from A have them, but there may have been an interval of a line between the confessions. This supposition is, however, of little moment to the argument.

course, been noted by everyone; he thinks it not only abrupt, but unsatisfactory, and suggests that the leaf lost at this point contained, not only the whole of the confession of Wrath, but also a few concluding lines belonging to Envy.

Still further confirmation, slight though it be, may be found, it occurs to me, in the fact that, while not only every new section, but every new paragraph, in some of the MSS. collated by Professor Skeat, is indicated by a paragraph mark, none stands at the beginning of l. 236. And whatever may be thought of my contention that ll. 236–41 do not belong to Sloth, it is at least certain that they constitute a new paragraph. If they belong to Sloth, the mark was omitted by error; if to Robert the Robber, no mark stands there because the paragraph does not begin there but earlier, as the conjunction "And" indeed indicates.

We have found, then, that the hypothesis of a lost leaf between l. 235 and l. 236 not only explains all the difficulties of the text at that point—such as the inappropriateness of ll. 236–41 to Sloth, their true relation to ll. 242–59, the abrupt ending of the confession of Sloth and the absence of a paragraph mark at l. 236—but also accounts for the unaccountable omission of the confession of Wrath and for the abruptness of the end of the confession of Envy.

The omission of Wrath and the confusion as to Sloth were noticed by B, and he treated them rather ingeniously. He introduced into the earlier part of Sloth's confession a declaration that he had often been so slothful as to withhold the wages of his servants and to forget to return things he had borrowed. To supply the omission of Wrath, he himself wrote a *Confessio Irae*, totally different in style from the work of A, and, indeed, more appropriate for Envy than for Wrath, containing as it does no very distinctive traits of Wrath. The additions both here and in the confession of Sloth are confused, vague, and entirely lacking in the finer qualities of imagination, organization, and diction shown in all A's work. He did not attempt to deal with the other difficulties we have found.

It is possible, I suppose, to accept my argument up to the beginning of the preceding paragraph, and still maintain that B was after all the author of A also and merely rectified in his second version errors that had crept into his first. To do this, however, one must resolutely shut one's eyes to the manifest and manifold differences in mental qualities, in constructive ability, in vividness of diction, in versification, and in many other matters, that exist between A I–VIII and B. These will form a part of the volume in which I hope to define the portions of this great poem to be allotted to each of the principal writers engaged upon it, to set forth clearly their differences, and to vindicate for the first author the rank he clearly deserves. The work will

not be, I think, entirely one of destructive criticism. The poem, as a whole, will gain in interest and significance; and the intellectual life of the second half of the fourteenth century will seem even more vigorous than it has seemed.

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Dr. Henry Bradley's Letter in *The Athenæum*, April 21, 1906, p. 481, on Prof. Manly's discovery.

THE MISPLACED LEAF OF 'PIERS THE PLOWMAN.'

Clarendon Press, Oxford.

The January number of *Modern Philology* contains an article by Prof. J. M. Manly, entitled 'The Lost Leaf of Piers the Plowman,' in which the author endeavours to account for certain strange incoherences in the fifth Passus of the A-text of the poem. He has, I think, shown beyond doubt that they cannot have proceeded from the poet himself, but must have been due to accidents that happened to an archetypal MS. By this discovery, which has a very important bearing on the criticisms of the later recensions of the poem, Prof. Manly has established a claim to the gratitude of scholars, although, as I propose to show, the particular hypothesis by which he has attempted to account for the phenomena is not the correct one.

The Passus describes how, moved by the eloquent preaching of Conscience, the personifications of the seven deadly sins came forward in succession to confess their guilt and promise amendment. The story is admirably told on the whole, but has two surprising faults. In the first place, the confession of Wrath, which ought to come in between those of Envy and Covetousness, is, in all the MSS. of the A-text, omitted altogether. In the second place, the confession of Sloth, who comes last of the seven, is made to end with six lines, in which he irrelevantly promises restitution of ill-gotten gains, and is followed by eighteen lines, in which "Robert the robber" bewails his crimes, and vows henceforth to lead an honest life. The Passus consists of only 263 lines; and if we are to suppose that in this short space the poet managed to perpetrate these two extraordinary blunders, we must ascribe to him a degree either of thoughtlessness or of stupidity not easily conceivable. The supposition by which Prof. Manly tries to relieve the poet from this charge is, that a MS. from which all the existing MSS. descend, had lost two leaves —one between lines 106 and 107, containiug the confession of Wrath, and the other between lines 235 and 236, containing the conclusion of the confession of Sloth, and some matter leading up to the confession of Robert the robber. As the interval between the two supposed lacunæ would occupy

four pages containing about 31 lines each (which would be a likely size in a MS. of the period), Prof. Manly concludes that the two lost leaves formed the innermost fold but one in a quire or gathering.

This hypothesis is undeniably ingenious; but unfortunately it does not fully answer its purpose of vindicating the poet from the charge of bad workmanship. It does, no doubt, enable us to escape the incredible conclusion that he forgot to mention one of the seven deadly sins, and represented Sloth as promising restitution of fraudulent gains. But it leaves us still under the necessity of supposing that, after relating in succession the confessions of the personifications of the seven sins, he introduced at the end a new penitent, whose offences, according to mediæval classification, belong to one of the branches of Covetousness. It can, I think, be shown that the poet was not guilty of this blunder of construction.

Prof. Manly has failed to perceive that the proper place of lines 236–59 is after line 145, at the end of the confession of Covetousness. In this position they not only fit perfectly, but actually improve the sense. But how are we to account for their transposition? In my opinion, the source of all the mischief is to be sought, not in a MS. written on parchment arranged in quires or gatherings, but in the "copy" (to use the word in the modern printer's sense) handed by the author to the first transcriber. This would no doubt be written on loose leaves of paper. It appears that one (or more) of these leaves (containing the confession of Wrath and the end of the confession of Envy) got lost, and that another (containing lines 236–59) was misplaced. It is possible that the transposed leaf was put in the place of a lost leaf, the last but one of the Passus. But I doubt whether this supposition is really necessary; the confession of Sloth no doubt ends rather abruptly, as do some of the other confessions, but I am not sure that anything is wanting.

Prof. Manly states that his study of 'Piers the Plowman' has led him to the conclusion that the three recensions known as A, B, and C are the work of three different authors. The evidence in support of this revolutionary theory is reserved for a forthcoming book; but Prof. Manly points out in his paper that the B revision of A. v. is based on the present defective text, and that the reviser attempted to remedy its faults in somewhat unintelligent fashion. The fact seems to be unquestionable, and certainly affords *prima facie* a strong argument against the received theory of unity of authorship. My correction of Prof. Manly's hypothesis only adds force to his argument. Even allowing for the fifteen years' interval which, according to Prof. Skeat, separates the dates of the A and B texts, it would be surprising if a poet, in revising his own work, failed to detect an accidental transposition that destroyed the symmetry of his plan. It is, by the way, a

noteworthy fact (whatever its precise interpretation may be) that the C revision restores the passage about "Robert the robber" to what I consider to be its original place.

Whether Prof. Manly will be successful in establishing his new theories respecting the history of the text remains to be seen; but he is certainly entitled to the credit of having initiated a new stage in the progress of Langland criticism.

The rejection of the unity of authorship of the three texts of 'Piers the Plowman' would of course involve the abandonment of Prof. Skeat's almost universally accepted attribution of 'Richard the Redeless' to Langland. An interesting fact, hitherto, so far as I know, unnoticed, is that Bale ('Index,' ed. Poole, p. 479) mentions the latter poem, on the authority of, Nicholas Brigham, under the title 'Mum, Soth-segger!' (*i. e.* 'Hush, truth-teller!'). There can be no doubt of the identity of the piece referred to, for Bale gives a Latin translation of the first two lines. The title is certainly appropriate, and so picturesque that it may well have proceeded from the author. Unluckily, the poem appears to have been anonymous in the copy seen by Brigham.

HENRY BRADLEY.

See also Mr. Theophilus Hall's Article in *The Modern Language Review* for October 1908, showing how impossible it is that the author of A could have so spoilt his own good work, and many passages of the B-man, in the way that the writer of the C-Text has done. Prof. Manly has some dozen Papers by clever pupils of his who have studied the question from different points of view—alliteration, metre, vocabulary, figurative language, &c.,—and all come to the same conclusion, that the revisers of the A-text into B, and B into C, cannot have been the A-man.

CHAPTER I

PIERS THE PLOWMAN AND ITS SEQUENCE

FEW poems of the Middle Ages have had a stranger fate than those grouped under the general title of *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*. Obviously very popular in the latter half of the fourteenth century, the time of their composition, they remained popular throughout the fifteenth century, were regarded in the sixteenth by the leaders of the reformation as an inspiration and a prophecy, and, in modern times, have been quoted by every historian of the fourteenth century as the most vivid and trustworthy source for the social and economic history of the time. Yet their early popularity has resulted in the confusion of what is really the work of five different men, and in the creation of a mythical author of all these poems and one other; and the nature of the interest of the sixteenth century reformers has caused a misunderstanding of the objects and aims of the satire contained in the poems separately and collectively. Worst of all, perhaps, the failure of modern scholars to distinguish the presence of several hands in the poems has resulted in a general charge of vagueness and obscurity, which has not even spared a portion of the work remarkable for its clearness and definiteness and structural excellence.

Before taking up any of the problems just suggested, we may recall briefly certain undisputed facts as to the form of the poems. They are written throughout in alliterative verse of the same general type as that of *Beowulf* and other Old English poems, and, at first sight, seem to form one long poem, extant in versions differing somewhat from one another. As Skeat has conclusively shown in his monumental editions of the texts, there are three principal versions or texts, which he designates the A-text, the B-text and the C-text, or the Vernon, the Crowley and the Whitaker versions respectively. The A-text, or Vernon version, consists of three visions supposed to come to the author while

sleeping beside a stream among the Malvern hills. The first of these, occupying the prologue and passus I—IV, is the vision of the field full of folk—a symbol of the world—and Holy Church and Lady Meed; the second, occupying passus V—VIII, is the vision of Piers the Plowman and the crowd of penitents whom he leads in search of Saint Truth; the third, occupying passus IX—XII, is a vision in which the dreamer goes in search of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best, but is attacked by hunger and fever and dies ere his quest is accomplished. The B-text and the C-text are successive modifications and expansions of the A-text.

Let us turn now from fact to theory. The two principal authorities, Skeat and Jusserand, though differing in details, agree, in the main, in the account they give of the poems and the author; and their account is very generally accepted. It is as follows. The author was William Langland (or Langley), born about 1331—2 at Cleobury Mortimer, 32 miles S.S.E. from Shrewsbury and 137 N.W. from London, and educated in the school of the Benedictine monastery at Malvern, among the hills S.W. of Worcester. Whether he was the son of freemen (Skeat's view) or of serfs (Jusserand's view), he was, at any rate, educated for the church and probably took minor orders; but, because of his temperament, his opinions, his marriage, or his lack of influential friends, he never rose in the church. At some unknown date, possibly before 1362, he removed to London and made a scanty living by singing masses, copying legal documents and other similar casual occupations. In 1362, he began his famous poems, writing first the vision of Lady Meed and the vision of Piers the Plowman. Perhaps immediately, perhaps after an interval of some time, he added to these the vision of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best. This first version of these poems constitutes what is now called the A-text of *Piers the Plowman*. But, according to the current view, the author did not leave matters thus. Encouraged by the success of his work and impelled by his increasing indignation at the corruptions of the age, he took up his poem again in 1377 and expanded it to more than twice its original length. The lines of the earlier version he left essentially unchanged; but he inserted, here and there, additions of greater or less length, suggested now by some word or phrase of the original text, now by events in the world about him and his meditations on them; and he rejected the whole of the final passus, containing an imaginary account of his death, to replace it by a continuation of the vision of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best longer than the whole of the original version of the poem. The

A-text had contained a prologue and four passus (or cantos) of the vision of Lady Meed, four passus of the vision of Piers the Plowman and four passus of the vision of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best, or twelve passus in all, with a total of 2567 lines. The B-text runs parallel to this to the end of passus XI (but with 3206 lines instead of 2467), and then continues for nine more passus, making a total of 7242 lines. The author's active interest in his poem did not cease here, however, for he subjected it to another revision, about 1393 (according to Skeat) or 1398 (according to Jusserand). This revision is known as the C-text. Its relation to the B-text may be roughly stated as consisting in the insertion of a few passages, the rearrangement of a considerable number and the rewriting of a number of others with more or less change of content or of emphasis, but, on the whole, as involving no such striking differences from the B-text as exist between that and the A-text. This latest version numbers 7357 lines as against the 7242 of the second version.

Skeat and Jusserand ascribe to the same author another poem in alliterative verse, commonly known as *Richard the Redeless*, concerning the last years of the reign of Richard II. This poem, which, as we have it, is a fragment, was, Skeat thinks, written between the capture and the formal deposition of Richard in 1399, and was, perhaps, left unfinished by the author in consequence of the fate of the king.

The evidence relied upon to prove that all these poems were the work of a single author is entirely the internal evidence of the poems themselves, supposed similarity in ideas, style, diction, etc., together with the difficulty of supposing the existence, at, approximately, the same time, of several unknown writers of such ability as is displayed in these poems. Undoubtedly, the first impulse of any student of a group of poems related as these are is to assume that they are the work of a single author, and that any statements made in the poems concerning the personality and experiences of the dreamer are autobiographical revelations. Moreover, in this particular case, it will be remembered, each of the two later versions incorporates with its additions the preceding version; and, as the C-text, on account of the larger mass of material in it, has received the almost exclusive attention of scholars, the impression of the style and other literary qualities gained by the modern student has, necessarily, been a composite of the qualities of the three texts and not a distinct sense of the qualities of each and the differences between them.

Such differences do exist, and in the greatest number and variety. There are differences in diction, in metre, in sentence structure, in methods of organising material, in number and kind of rhetorical devices, in power of visualising objects and scenes presented, in topics of interest to the author and in views on social, theological and various miscellaneous questions. Some of these have, indeed, been observed and discussed by previous writers, but they have always been explained as due to such changes as might occur in any man's mental qualities and views of life in the course of thirty or thirty-five years, the interval between the earliest and the latest version. To the present writer the differences seem of such a nature as not to admit of such an explanation; and this opinion is confirmed by the existence of certain passages in which the authors of the later versions have failed to understand their predecessors.

This is, of course, not the place for polemics or for a detailed examination of all the problems suggested by the poems. Our principal concern is with the poems themselves as literary monuments and, if it may be, with their author or authors. But, for this very reason, it seems necessary to present the poems in such a way as to enable the student to decide for himself between the two theories of authorship, inasmuch as this decision carries with it important conclusions concerning the literary values of the poems, the mental qualities of the authors and the intellectual activity of the age to which they belong. Fortunately, such a presentation is precisely that which will best set forth the contents of the poems and their qualities.

Let us examine first the prologue and passus I–VIII of the A-text. This is not an arbitrary dismemberment of a poem. The two visions included in these passus are intimately connected with each other and definitely separated from what follows. At the beginning of the prologue the dreamer goes to sleep among the Malvern hills and sees a vision of the world in the guise of a field full of folk thronging a valley bounded on one side by a cliff, on which stands the tower of Truth, and, on the other, by a deep dale, in which, surrounded by a dark moat, lies the dungeon of Wrong. Within this valley begin the incidents of his first vision, and, though they range far, there is never any suggestion of discontinuity; at the end of the vision the dreamer wakes for only a moment, and, immediately falling asleep, sees again the same field of folk and another series of events unfolding themselves in rapid succession beneath the cliff with its high-built tower, until,

finally, he wakes 'meatless and moneyless in Malvern hills.' The third vision, on the other hand, has no connection with Malvern hills; the dreamer sees nothing of his valley, with the folk and the tower and the dungeon; indeed, this is not a vision at all in the sense of the first two, but, rather, a series of dream-visits and dream-discussions, the like of which cannot be found in the first two visions. Skeat himself has recognised the close connection between the first two visions, and has suggested that the third may have been written after a considerable interval.

Each of the first two visions in the A-text is, contrary to the usual opinion, distinguished by remarkable unity of structure, directness of movement and freedom from digression of any sort. The author marshals his dream-figures with marvellous swiftness, but with unerring hand; he never himself forgets for a moment the relation of any incident to his whole plan, nor allows his reader to forget it, or to feel at a loss as to its meaning or its place.

We first see, with the vividness of the dreamer's own vision, the thronging crowd in the valley beneath the tower of Truth and hovering on the brink of the dark dale. People of all sorts are there—the poor and the rich, saints and sinners of every variety, living as they live in the world. Singly and in groups they pass before us, each noted by the poet with a word or a phrase that gives us their very form and pressure. Satire there is, but it is satire which does not impede the movement of the thronged dream, satire which flashes and plays about the object, revealing its inner nature by a word, an epithet, a brief phrase. We see the false beggars shamming for food and fighting at the ale-house, 'great lubbers and long that loth were to labour'; the friars, 'preaching the people for profit of their bellies'; the pardoner, surrounded by the crowd of ignorant believers, whom he deceives with his papal bull and his fair speech; and the corrupt priest, taking his share of the ill-gotten gains, while the bishop, who is not 'worth his two ears,' refuses to interfere. Then come a hundred lawyers in hoods of silk, ready to undertake any cause for money, but refusing 'to unloose their lips once for love of our Lord'; 'you could more easily,' says the poet, 'measure the mist on Malvern hills than get a mum of their mouths unless money were showed.' After them appears a confused throng of churchmen of all degrees, all 'leaping to London' to seek worldly offices and wealth. Wasters there are, and idle labourers 'that do their deeds ill and drive forth the long day with singing *Dieu save Dame Emme!*' Along with the satire there is commendation, now for the ploughmen who

work hard and play seldom; now, of a higher sort, for pious nuns and hermits; now, for honest merchants; now, even for harmless minstrels who 'get gold with their glee.' But, neither satire nor commendation delays even for a moment our rapid survey of this marvellous motley crowd, or detracts from our feeling that, in this valley of vision, the world in miniature is visibly moving, living, working, cheating, praying, singing, crying for sale its 'hot pies,' its 'good geese and pigs,' its 'white wine and red.'

The author, having thus, in his prologue, set before us the vision first presented to the eyes of his mind, proceeds to interpret it. This he does characteristically by a further development of the dream itself.

A lovely lady comes down from the cliff and says to the dreamer:

> Son, seest thou this people, how engrossed they are in this confusion? The most part of the people that pass now on earth, if they have success in this world, care for nothing else; of other heaven than here they take no account.

The impression already made upon us by this strange majestic figure is deepened by the author's vivid comment, 'I was afeard of her face, fair though she was, and said, "Mercy, my lady; what is the meaning of this?"' The tower, she explains, is the dwelling of Truth, the Father of our faith, who formed us all and commanded the earth to serve mankind with all things needful. He has given food and drink and clothing to suffice for all, but to be used with moderation, for excess is sinful and dangerous to the soul. The dreamer enquires curiously about money: 'the money on this earth that men so fast hold, tell me to whom that treasure belongs.' 'Go to the Gospel,' she replies, 'and consider what Christ himself said when the people apposed him with a penny.' He then asks the meaning of the dungeon in the deep dale.

> That is the castle of Care; whoso comes therein may ban that he was born to body or to soul; in it dwells a wight named Wrong, the father of False, who seduced Adam and Cain and Judas. He is a hinderer of love, and deceives all who trust in their vain treasures.

Wondering who she is that utters such wisdom, the dreamer is informed that she is Holy Church. 'Thou oughtest to know me; I received thee first and taught thee faith, and thou didst promise to love me loyally while thy life should endure.' He falls upon his knees, beseeching her favour and begging her to teach him so to believe on Christ as to do His will: 'Teach me to no treasure but tell me this, how I may save my soul!'

'When all treasure is tried,' she declares, 'Truth is the best; it is as precious as God himself. Whoso is true of his tongue and of his deeds, and does ill to no man, is accounted to the Gospel and likened to our Lord. Truth is claimed by Christian and non-Christian; it should be kept by all. Kings and knights are bound by it, cherubim and seraphim and all the orders of angels were knighted by Christ and taught to know Truth. Lucifer and his fellows failed in obedience, and sinned by pride, and fell; but all who keep Truth may be sure that their souls shall go to heaven to be crowned by Truth; for, when all treasure is tried, Truth is the best.' 'But what is it? By what quality or power of my nature does it begin, and where?' 'Thou fool, it is a teaching of nature to love thy Lord dearer than thyself, and do no deadly sin though thou shouldst die. This is Truth, and none can teach thee better; it is the most precious thing demanded by our Lord. Love began by the Father and was perfected in the death of his Son. Be merciful as He was merciful, for, unless you live truly, and love and help the poor, you have no merit in Mass or in Hours. Faith without works is dead; chastity without charity is as foul as an unlighted lamp. *Date et dabitur vobis*, this is the lock of love that lets out my grace to comfort all sinful; it is the readiest way that leads to heaven.'

With this Holy Church declares that she can stay no longer, and passus I closes.

But the dreamer kneels and beseeches her, crying,

'Mercy, my lady, for the love of her that bore the blissful Babe that redeemed us on the cross; teach me to know False!' 'Look on thy left hand and see where he stands—both False and Favel (Duplicity) and all his whole house.' I looked on the left hand as the lady taught me; and I saw a woman wonderfully clothed, arrayed in furs the richest on earth, crowned with a crown no less costly than the king's, all her five fingers loaded with rings, with the most precious stones that prince ever wore. 'Who is this woman,' said I, 'thus richly attired?' 'That is the maiden Meed, who has often injured me. To-morrow will the marriage be made of her and False. Favel brought them together, Guile prepared her for it and Liar has directed the whole affair. I warn thee that thou mayst know them all, and keep thyself from them, if thou desirest to dwell with Truth in his bliss. I can stay no longer; I commit thee to our Lord.'

All the rich retinue that held with False was bidden to the bridal. Simony was sent for to seal the charters and feoff Meed with all the possessions of False and Favel. But there was no house that could hold the throng that came. In a moment, as if by some magical process, we see a pavilion pitched on a hill, with ten thousand tents set about it, for all men of all orders to witness the feoffment of Meed. Then Favel brought her forth, and Simony and Civil (Civil Law) stood forth and unfolded the charter, which was drawn up in due legal form and endowed the contracting parties with all the provinces of the seven deadly sins, 'to have and to hold, and all their heirs after, with the appurtenance of Purgatory, even to the torment of Hell; yielding, for this thing, at the year's end, their souls to Satan.' This was duly witnessed

and delivered. But Theology objected to the wedding, because Meed was no bastard and should be wedded according to the choice of Truth.

The workman is worthy of his hire. False is no mate for her; she is of good birth and might kiss the king for cousin. Take her to London and see if the law will permit this wedding; and beware, for Truth is wise, and Conscience, who knows you all, is of his counsel.

Civil agreed, but Simony demanded money for his services. Then Favel brought forth gold, and began to bribe officers and witnesses; and all promised to go to London and support his claims before the court at Westminster.

The incident which follows is one of the best examples of the author's power of visualisation and of rapid narration unbroken by explanation or moralisation; for the moralising lines, unfortunately admitted into Skeat's text, which interrupt the narrative and tend to delay and obscure it, do not belong to the original, but are found in one MS only. To the rapidity and assurance with which the picture is developed is, perhaps, due in no small part the readiness with which we accept it and the vitality and solidity which these personified abstractions maintain throughout the dream.

'Then they lacked horses to carry them thither, but Favel brought forth foals of the best. He set Meed on a sheriff's back, shod all new, and False on a juror that trotted softly.' In like manner for each of the abstractions was provided some appropriate, concrete evil-doer; and, thus equipped, the fantastic crew immediately set out. But Soothness saw them well, and said little, but rode hard and came first to court. There he told Conscience, and Conscience reported to the king, all that had happened. 'Now, by Christ,' said the king, 'if I might catch False or any of his fellows, I would hang them by the neck.' Dread, standing at the door, heard his doom, and went wightly to warn False. At the news, the wedding party fled in all directions. False fled to the friars, Liar leaped away lightly, lurked through lanes, buffeted by many and ordered to leave, until pardoners had pity on him and received him as one of themselves. Then he was in demand: physicians and merchants and minstrels and messengers wanted him; but the friars induced him to come with them. Of the whole wedding party, only Meed durst stay, and she trembled and wept and wrung her hands when she was arrested.

In passus III the king orders that Meed shall be treated courteously, and declares that he himself will ask her whom she

wishes to wed, and, if she acts reasonably, he will forgive her. So a clerk brought her to the chamber. At once people began to profess friendship for her and promise aid. The justices came, and said, 'Mourn not, Meed; we will clear thee.' She thanked them and gave them cups of clean gold and rings with rubies. Clerks came, and said, 'We are thine own, to work thy will while life lasts.' She promised to reward them all: 'no ignorance shall hinder the advancement of him whom I love.' A confessor offered to shrive her for a seam of wheat and to serve her in any evil. She told him a tale and gave him money to be her bedesman and her bawd. He assoiled her, and then suggested that, if she would help them with a stained glass window they were putting in, her name would be recorded on it and her soul would be sure of heaven. 'Knew I that,' said the woman, 'there is neither window nor altar that I would not make or mend, and inscribe my name thereon.' Here the author declares the sin of such actions, and exhorts men to cease such inscriptions, and give alms. He also urges mayors to punish brewers, bakers, butchers and cooks, who, of all men on earth, do most harm by defrauding the poor. 'Meed,' he remarks, 'urged them to take bribes and permit such cheating; but Solomon says that fire shall consume the houses of those who take bribes.'

Then the king entered and had Meed brought before him. He addressed her courteously, but said, 'Never hast thou done worse than now, but do so no more. I have a knight called Conscience; wilt thou marry him?' 'Yea, lord,' said the lady, 'God forbid else!' Conscience was called and asked if he would wed her.

Nay, Christ forbid! She is frail of her flesh, fickle, a causer of wantonness. She killed father Adam and has poisoned popes. She is as common as the cart-way; she releases the guilty and hangs the innocent. She is privy with the pope, and she and Simony seal his bulls. She maintains priests in concubinage. She leads the law as she pleases, and suppresses the complaints of the poor.

Meed tried to defend herself by charging that Conscience had caused greater evils. He had killed a king. He had caused a king to give up his campaign in Normandy.

Had I been the king's marshal, he should have been lord of all that land. A king ought to give rewards to all that serve him; popes both receive and give rewards; servants receive wages; beggars, alms; the king pays his officers; priests expect mass-pence; craftsmen and merchants, all take meed.

The king was impressed by this plea, and cried, 'By Christ, Meed is worthy to have such mastery.' But Conscience kneeled,

and explained that there are two kinds of meed; the one, such as God gives to men who love him; the other, such as maintains evil-doers. 'Such as take bribes shall answer for it; priests that take money for masses have their reward on earth only. Wages is not meed, nor is there meed in the bargains of merchants.' He then illustrates the dangers of meed by the story of Saul and the Amalekites, and ends by declaring that Reason shall reign and govern realms; Meed shall no more be master, but Love and Humility and Loyalty shall rule, and Kind-Wit and Conscience together shall make Law a labourer, such love shall arise.

The king interrupted him and tried to effect a reconciliation between him and Meed, but Conscience refused, unless advised thereto by Reason. 'Ride forth and fetch Reason; he shall rule my realm,' replied the king. Conscience rode away gladly and returned with Reason, followed by Wit and Wisdom. The king welcomed Reason, and set him on the throne, between himself and his son; and, while they were talking together, Peace came, and put up a bill how Wrong had taken his wife, had stolen his geese, his pigs, his horse and his wheat, had murdered his men and beaten him. Wrong was afraid and tried to bribe Wisdom to plead for him. Wisdom and Wit told him that, without the help of Meed, he was ruined, and they took him to her. Peace showed the king his bloody head; and the king and Conscience knew he had been wronged; but Wisdom offered bail for Wrong and payment of the damages, and Meed offered Peace a present of gold; whereupon Peace begged the king to have mercy upon Wrong. The king swore he would not. Some urged Reason to have pity, but he declared that he would not

> till all lords and ladies love truth, and men cease to spoil children, and clerks and knights are courteous, and priests practise what they preach, till the custom of pilgrimages and of carrying money out of the land ceases, till Meed has no might to moot in this hall. Were I king, no wrong should go unpunished or get grace by bribes. Were this rule kept, Law would have to become a labourer, and Love should rule all.

When they heard this, all held Reason a master and Meed a wretch. Love laughed Meed to scorn. The king agreed that Reason spoke truth, but said it would be hard to establish such government. Reason asserted that it would be easy. Whereupon the king begged Reason to stay with him and rule the land as long as he lived. 'I am ready,' said Reason, 'to rest with thee ever; provided Conscience be our counsellor, I care for nothing better.' 'Gladly,' said the king; 'God forbid that he fail; and, as long as I live, let us keep together!'

Thus ends passus IV, and, with it, the first vision. The style and the method of composition are, in the highest degree, worthy of note. The author, it will be observed, sets forth his views, not, after the ordinary fashion of allegorists, by bringing together his personifications and using them as mere mouthpieces, but by involving them in a rapidly moving series of interesting situations, skilfully devised to cause each to act and speak in a thoroughly characteristic manner. They do not seem to be puppets, moving and speaking as the showman pulls the strings, but persons, endowed each with his own life and moved by the impulses of his own will. Only once or twice does the author interrupt his narration to express his own views or feelings, and never does he allow them to interfere with the skill or sincerity of expression of the *dramatis personae*. His presentation has, indeed, the clear, undisturbed objectivity of excellent drama, or of life itself.

In the prologue, the satire, as has been observed, is all incidental, casual; the same is true of passus I; for these two sections of the poem are not essentially satirical. The first is a purely objective vision of the world with its mingled good and evil; the second is the explanation of this vision with some comment and exhortation by Holy Church, the interpreter. The satire proper begins with passus II, and, from there to the end of this vision, is devoted to a single subject—Meed and the confusion and distress which, because of her, afflict the world. Friars, merchants, the clergy, justices, lawyers, all classes of men, indeed, are shown to be corrupted by love of Meed; but, contrary to current opinion, there is nowhere even the least hint of any personal animosity against any class of men as a class, or against any of the established institutions of church or state. The friars have often been supposed to be the special object of attack, but, so far as this vision is concerned, they fare better, on the whole, than do the lawyers. The only notable order of fourteenth century society that escapes censure altogether is that of the monks. Of them there is no direct criticism, though some of the MSS include monks among those to whom Meed is common (III, 127—8). The possible bearing of this fact upon the social status of the author will be discussed later.

As to the style, no summary or paraphrase can reproduce its picturesqueness and verve. It is always simple, direct, evocative of a constant series of clear and sharply-defined images of individuals and groups. Little or no attempt is made at elaborate, or even ordinarily full, description, and colour-words are singularly

few; but it would be difficult to find a piece of writing from which the reader derives a clearer vision of individuals or groups of moving figures in their habit as they lived. That the author was endowed in the highest degree with the faculty of visualisation is proved, not merely by his ability to stimulate the reader to form mental images, but even more by the fact that all the movements of individuals and groups can be followed with ease and certainty. Composition, in the larger sense of structural excellence, that quality common in French literature, but all too rare in English, and supposed to be notably lacking in *Piers the Plowman*, is one of the most striking features of this first vision.

What has just been said of the qualities of the first vision is true in equal degree of the second, *The Vision of Piers the Plowman*, properly so called, which occupies passus V—VIII. In outline it is as follows:

At the close of the preceding vision, the king and his company went to the church to hear the services. The dreamer saw them enter, and awaked from his dream disappointed and sorrowful that he had not slept more soundly and seen more. But, ere he had gone a furlong, a faintness seized him, and he sat softly down and said his creed; then he fell asleep and saw more than he had seen before. He saw again the field full of folk and Conscience with a cross preaching among them, urging them to have pity on themselves and declaring that the pestilences were caused by their sins, and that the great storm of wind on Saturday at even (15 January 1362) was a punishment for pride. Wasters were warned to go to work; chapmen to cease spoiling their children; Pernel, to give up her purfle; Thomas and Wat, to look after their frail and extravagant wives; priests, to practise what they preached; members of the religious orders, to keep their vows, lest the king and his council should take possession of their property; pilgrims, to cease journeying to St James, and seek St Truth. Then ran Repentance and moved the hearts of all; William wept; Pernel Proudheart prostrated herself; Lecher, Envy, Covetousness, Glutton, Sloth, Robert the Robber, all repented. The confessions of the seven deadly sins (an accident has deprived us of the confession of Wrath and of a portion of Envy's) follow one another with breathless rapidity, and the climax is reached when, in the words of the author, 'a thousand of men then thronged together, crying upward to Christ and to His pure Mother to have grace to seek St Truth—God grant they so may!'

With this passus V closes; but the movement of the narrative is uninterrupted. Some spurious lines printed by Skeat do, indeed, cause a semblance of at least a momentary delay; but the authentic text is better constructed.

There were few so wise, however, that they knew the way thither (*i.e.* to St Truth), but blustered forth as beasts over valleys and hills, till it was late and long that they met a person apparelled like a pilgrim, with relics of the many shrines he had visited. He had been at Sinai, Bethlehem, Babylon, Armenia, Alexandria and in many other places, but had never heard of St Truth, nor met a palmer seeking such a saint.

'By St Peter!' cried a ploughman, and put forth his head, 'I know him as well as a clerk his book; Conscience and Kind-Wit directed me to him and taught me to serve him ever. I have been his man these fifteen years, sowed his seed, kept his beasts, diked and delved and done his bidding in all things.'

The pilgrims offered him money to show them the way; but Piers, the ploughman, cried,

Nay, by the peril of my soul! I would not take a penny for the whole wealth of St Thomas's shrine; Truth would love me the less. But this is the way. You must go through Meekness till you come to Conscience-that-Christ-knows-that-you-love-him-dearer-than-the-life-in-your-hearts-and-your-neighbour-next. Then cross the brook Be-buxom-of-speech by the ford Honour-thy-father; pass by Swear-not-in-vain and the croft Covet-not, with the two stocks Slay-not and Steal-not; stop not at Bear-no-false-witness, and then will be seen Say-sooth. Thus shalt thou come to a court, clear as the sun; the moat is of Mercy, the walls of Wit, to keep Will out, the cornells of Christendom, the brattice of Faith, the roof of Brotherly Love. The tower in which Truth is is set above the sun; he may do with the day-star what him dear liketh; Death dare do naught that he forbids. The gate-keeper is Grace, his man is Amend-thou, whose favour thou must procure. At the gate also are seven sisters, Abstinence, Humility, Charity, Chastity, Patience, Peace and Generosity. Any of their kin are welcomed gladly, and, unless one is kin to some of these seven, he gets no entrance except by grace.

'By Christ,' cried a cut-purse, 'I have no kin there!' And so said some others; but Piers replied, 'Yes; there is there a maiden, Mercy, who has power over them all. She is sib to all sinful, and, through help of her and her Son, you may get grace there, if you go early.'

Passus VII opens with the remark that this would be a difficult way without a guide at every step. 'By Peter!' replied Piers, 'were my half-acre ploughed, I would go with you myself.' 'That would be a long delay,' said a lady; 'what shall we women do meanwhile?' 'Sew and spin and clothe the needy.' 'By Christ!' exclaimed a knight, 'I never learned to plough; but teach me, and I will help you.' But Piers rejected his offer and bade him

do only those services that belong to knighthood, and practise the virtues of a kindly lord. The knight promised to do so, and Piers prepared for his ploughing. Those who helped were to be fed. Before setting out on his journey, however, he wished to make his will, bequeathing his soul to God, his body to the church, his property to his wife to divide among his friends and his dear children.

Piers and the pilgrims set to work; some helped him to plough, others diked up the balks, others plucked weeds. At high prime (9 a.m.) Piers looked about and saw that some had merely been singing at the ale and helping him with 'hey, troly-loly!' He threatened them with famine, and the shirkers feigned to be lame or blind, and begged alms. 'I shall soon see if what you say is true,' said Piers; 'those who will not work shall eat only barley bread and drink of the brook. The maimed and blind I will feed, and anchorites once a day, for once is enough.' Then the wasters arose and would have fought. Piers called on the knight for protection, but the knight's efforts were vain. He then called upon Hunger, who seized Waster by the maw and wrung him so that his eyes watered, and beat the rascals till he nearly burst their ribs. Piers in pity came between them with a pease-loaf. Immediately all the sham ailments disappeared; and blind, bed-ridden, lame asked for work. Piers gave it to them, but, fearing another outbreak, asked Hunger what should be done in that event. The reply, which contains the author's view of the labour-problem, was that able-bodied beggars were to be given nothing to eat but horse-bread and dog-bread and bones and thus driven to work, but the unfortunate and the naked and needy were to be comforted with alms. In reply to a further question whether it is right to make men work, Hunger cited *Genesis*, *Proverbs*, *Matthew* and the *Psalms*. 'But some of my men are always ill,' said Piers. 'It comes of over-eating; they must not eat until they are hungry, and then only in moderation.' Piers thanked him, and gave him leave to go whenever he would; but Hunger replied that he would not go till he had dined. Piers had only cheese, curds, an oat-cake, a loaf of beans and bran and a few vegetables, which must last till harvest; so the poor people brought peascods, beans and cherries to feed Hunger. He wanted more, and they brought pease and leeks. And in harvest they fed him plentifully and put him to sleep. Then beggars and labourers became dainty and demanded fine bread and fresh meats, and there was grumbling about wages and cursing of the king and

his council for the labour-laws. The author warns workmen of their folly, and prophesies the return of famine.

In passus VIII we are told that Truth heard of these things and sent to Piers a message to work and a pardon *a poena et a culpa* for him and his heirs. Part in this pardon was granted to kings, knights and bishops who fulfil their duties. Merchants, because of their failure to observe holidays, were denied full participation; but they received a letter from Truth under his privy seal authorising them to trade boldly, provided they devoted their profits to good works, the building of hospitals, the repairing of bridges, the aiding of poor maidens and widows and scholars. The merchants were glad, and gave Will woollen clothes for his pains in copying their letter. Men of law had least pardon, because of their unwillingness to plead without money; for water and air and wit are common gifts, and must not be bought and sold. Labourers, if true and loving and meek, had the same pardon that was sent to Piers. False beggars had none for their wicked deeds; but the old and helpless, women with child, the maimed and the blind, since they have their purgatory here upon earth, were to have, if meek, as full pardon as the Plowman himself.

Suddenly a priest asked to see Piers' pardon. It contained but two lines: *Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam; qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.* 'By St Peter!' said the priest, 'I find here no pardon, but "do well, and have well, and God shall have thy soul; and do evil, and have evil, and to hell shalt thou go."' Piers, in distress, tore it asunder, and declared that he would cease to labour so hard and betake himself to prayers and penance, for David ate his bread with weeping, and Luke tells us that God bade us to take no thought for ourselves, but to consider how He feeds the birds. The priest then jested at the learning of Piers, and asked who taught him. 'Abstinence and Conscience,' said Piers. While they were disputing, the dreamer awoke and looked about, and found that it was noontime, and he himself meatless and moneyless on Malvern hills.

Here the vision ends, but passus VIII contains 53 lines more, in which the writer discusses the trustworthiness of dreams and the comparative value of Do-well and letters of indulgence.

In this second vision, the satire of passus V is very general, consisting, as it does, of a series of confessions by the seven deadly sins, in which each is sketched with inimitable vividness and brevity. It is significant of the author's religious views, and in

harmony with such hints of them as he has given us elsewhere, that these confessions are not formal interviews with an authorised confessor, but, for the most part, sudden outcries of hearts which Conscience has wrought to contrition and repentance. The notable exceptions are the cases of Glutton and Sloth. Of these, the former has often been cited as one of the most remarkable pieces of *genre* painting in our early literature. It presents the veritable interior of an English ale-house in the fourteenth century, with all its basenesses and its gross hilarity.

Glutton is moved to repent, and starts for the church to confess, but, on his way thither, the ale-wife cries out to him. He says he is going to church to hear mass and confess. 'I have good ale, gossip; wilt thou try it?' He does not wish to drink, but asks if she has any spices to settle a queasy stomach. 'Yes, full good: pepper, peony, a pound of garlic and a little fennel-seed, to help topers on fasting days.' So Glutton goes in, and finds a crowd of his boon companions, Cis the shoemaker's wife, Wat the warrener and his wife, Tomkin the tinker and two of his men, Hick and Hodge and Clarice and Pernel and a dozen others; and all welcome him and offer him ale. Then they begin the sport called the New Fair, a game for promoting drinking. The whole day passes in laughter and ribaldry and carousing, and, at even-song, Glutton is so drunk that he walks like a gleeman's dog, sometimes aside and sometimes aback. As he attempts to go out, he falls; and his wife and servant come, and carry him home and put him to bed. When he wakes, two days later, his first word is, 'Where is the cup?' But his wife lectures him on his wickedness, and he begins to repent and profess abstinence.

As for Sloth, his confession, though informal, is not sudden, for the sufficient reason that he is too slothful to do anything suddenly.

The satire of passus VI and VII is directed principally, if not solely, against the labouring classes. In sentiment and opinion the author is entirely in harmony with parliament, seeing in the efforts of the labourers to get higher wages for their work only the unjustifiable demands of wicked, lazy, lawless vagabonds. In regard to the remedy, however, he differs entirely from parliament. He sees no help in the Statutes of Labourers or in any power that the social organisation can apply; the vain efforts of the knight when called upon by Piers for protection from the wasters (VII, 140 ff.) clearly indicate this. The only hope of the re-establishment of good conditions lies in the possibility that the wicked may be terrified by the prospect of famine, God's punishment for

their wickedness, and may labour and live as does Piers Plowman, the ideal free labourer of the established order. The author is in no sense an innovator; he is a reformer only in the sense of wishing all men to see and feel the duties of the station in life to which they belong, and to do them as God has commanded.

Passus VIII is an explicit presentation of this idea, a re-assertion of the doctrine announced by Holy Church at the beginning of passus I and illustrated by all the visionary events that follow—the doctrine, namely, that, 'When all treasure is tried, Truth is the best.' The pardon sent to Piers is only another phrasing of this doctrine; and, though Piers himself is bewildered by the jibes of the priest and tears the pardon 'in pure teen,' though the dreamer wakes before the advent of any reassuring voice, and wakes to find himself hungry and poor and alone, we know authentically that there lies in the heart of the author not even the slightest question of the validity of his heaven-sent dreams.

The third vision, passus IX—XII of the A-text, differs from the first two, as has been said above, in very material respects. The theme is not presented by means of vitalised allegory; there are allegorical figures, to be sure, but their allegorical significance is only superficial, not essential; they engage in no significant action, but merely indulge in debate and disquisition; and what they say might be said by any one else quite as appropriately and effectively. Moreover, the clearness of phrasing, the orderliness and consecutiveness of thought, which so notably characterise the early visions, are entirely lacking, as are also the wonderful visualisation and vivid picturesqueness of diction. These differences are so striking that they cannot be overlooked by any one whose attention has once been directed to them. To the present writer they seem to justify the conclusion that in the third vision we have, not a poem written by the author of the first two, either immediately after them or even a few years later, but the work of a continuator, who tried to imitate the previous writer, but succeeded only superficially, because he had not the requisite ability as a writer, and because he failed to understand what were the distinctive features in the method of his model; but students of the poems have heretofore felt—without, I think, setting definitely before their minds the number and the character of these differences—that they were not incompatible with the theory of a single author for all the poems.

It is not intended to argue the question here, and, consequently,

the differences will not be discussed further; but it may be of interest, to those who believe in a single author no less than to those who do not, to note, in addition, certain minor differences. The first writer seems not in the least interested in casuistry or theological doctrine, whereas notable features of the later passus are scholastic methods and interests, and a definite attitude towards predestination, which had been made by Bradwardine the foremost theological doctrine of the time, as we may infer from Chaucer and the author of *Pearl*. Indeed, the questions that interest the author of passus IX—XI are not only entirely different, but of a different order from those which interest the author of the first two visions. Further, the use of figurative language is entirely different; of the twelve similes in passus IX—XI four are rather elaborate, whereas all the twenty found in the earlier passus are simple, and, for the most part, stock phrases, like 'clear as the sun,' only four having so much as a modifying clause. The versification also presents differences in regard to the number of stresses in the half-line and in regard to run-on lines and masculine endings. Some of these differences begin to manifest themselves in the last fifty-three lines of passus VIII; and it is possible that the continuator began, not at IX, 1, but at VIII, 131. Of course, no one of the differences pointed out is, in itself, incompatible with the theory of a single author for all the passus of the A-text; but, taken together, they imply important differences in social and intellectual interests and in mental qualities and habits. They deserve, therefore, to be noted; for, if the same person is the author of all three visions, he has at least undergone profound and far-reaching changes of the most various kinds, and no mere general supposition of development or decay of his powers will explain the phenomena.

We proceed, then, without further discussion, to examine the contents of the later passus. Their professed subject is the search for Do-well, Do-better and Do-best, or, rather, for satisfactory definitions of them. What were the author's own views, it is very hard to determine; partly, perhaps, because he left the poem unfinished, but partly, also, because the objections which, as a disputant, he offers to the statements of others seem, sometimes, only cavils intended to give emphasis and definiteness to the views under discussion. It will be observed, however, that, on the whole, his model man is not the plain, honest, charitable labourer, like Piers, but the dutiful ecclesiastic. Other topics that are clearly of chief interest to the author are: the personal

responsibility of sane adults, and the vicarious responsibility of guardians for children and idiots; the duty of contentment and cheerful subjection to the will of God; the importance of pure and honourable wedlock; and the corruptions that have arisen, since the pestilence, in marriage and in the attitude of laymen towards the mysteries of faith, though Study, voicing, no doubt, the views of the author, admits that, but for the love in it, theology is a hard and profitless subject. There are also incidental discussions of the dangers of such branches of learning as astronomy, geometry, geomancy, etc.; of the chances of the rich to enter heaven; of predestination; and of the advantages as to salvation of the ignorant over the learned. A brief synopsis of these passus will make the method of treatment clearer.

Passus IX opens with the author roaming vainly about in his grey robes in search of Do-well, not in a dream, but while he is awake. At last, on a Friday, he meets two Franciscan friars, who tell him that Do-well dwells always with them. He denies this, in due scholastic form, on the ground that even the righteous sin seven times a day. The friars meet this argument by a rather confused illustration of a boat in which a man attempts to stand in a rough sea, and, though he stumbles and falls, does not fall out of the boat. The author declares he cannot follow the illustration, and says farewell. Wandering widely again, he reaches a wood, and, stopping to listen to the songs of the birds, falls asleep.

> There came a large man, much like myself, who called me by name and said he was Thought. 'Do-well,' said Thought, 'is the meek, honest labourer; Do-better is he who to honesty adds charity and the preaching of sufferance; Do-best is above both and holds a bishop's crosier to punish the wicked. Do-well and Do-better have crowned a king to protect them all and prevent them from disobeying Do-best.'

The author is dissatisfied; and Thought refers him to Wit, whom they soon meet, and whom Thought questions on behalf of the dreamer (here called 'our Will.')

In passus X, Wit says that Duke Do-well dwells in a castle with Lady Anima, attended by Do-better, his daughter, and Do-best. The constable of the castle is Sir Inwit, whose five sons, See-well, Say-well, Hear-well, Work-well and Go-well, aid him. Kind, the maker of the castle, is God; the castle is Caro (Flesh). Anima is Life; and Inwit is Discretion (not Conscience), as appears from a long and wandering discussion of his functions. Do-well destroys vices and saves the soul. Do-well is the fear of the Lord, and Do-better is the fear of punishment. If Conscience tells you that

you do well, do not desire to do better. Follow Conscience and fear not. If you strive to better yourself, you are in danger; a rolling stone gathers no moss and a jack of all trades is good at none. Whether you are married man, monk, canon, or even beggar, be content and murmur not against God. Do-well is dread, and Do-better is sufferance; and of dread and its deeds springs Do-best. As the sweet red rose springs from the briar, and wheat from a weed, so Do-best is the fruit of Do-well and Do-better, especially among the meek and lowly, to whom God gives his grace. Keepers of wedlock please God especially; of them come virgins, martyrs, monks, kings, etc. False folk are conceived in an ill hour, as was Cain. His descendants were accursed; and so were those of Seth, who intermarried with them, though warned against it. Because of these marriages, God ordered Noah to build the ark, and sent the flood to destroy Cain's seed. Even the beasts perished for the sin of these marriages. Nowadays, since the pestilence, many unequal marriages are made for money. These couples will never get the Dunmow flitch. All Christians should marry well and live purely, observing the *tempora clausa*. Otherwise, rascals are born, who oppose Do-well. Therefore, Do-well is dread; and Do-better is sufferance; and so comes Do-best and conquers wicked will.

In passus XI, Wit's wife, Study, is introduced. She rebukes him for casting pearls before swine, that is, teaching wisdom to those who prefer wealth. Wisdom is despised, unless carded with covetousness as clothiers card wool; lovers of Holy Writ are disregarded; minstrelsy and mirth have become lechery and bawdy tales. At meals, men mock Christ and the Trinity, and scorn beggars, who would perish but for the poor. Clerks have God much in the mouth but little in the heart. Every 'boy' cavils against God and the Scriptures. Austin the Old rebukes such. Believe and pray, and cavil not. Here now is a foolish fellow that wants to know Do-well from Do-better. Unless he live in the former, he shall not learn the latter.

At these words, Wit is confounded, and signals the author to seek the favour of Study. He, therefore, humbles himself, and Study is appeased, and promises to direct him to Clergȳ (Learning) and his wife, Scripture. The way lies by Sufferance, past Riches and Lechery, through Moderation of speech and of drink, to Clergy.

Tell him you were sent by me, who taught him and his wife. I also taught Plato and Aristotle and all craftsmen. But theology has troubled me much;

and, save for the love in it, it is naught. Love is Do-well; and Do-better and Do-best are of Love's school. Secular science teaches deceit, but theology teaches love. Astronomy, geometry, geomancy, alchemy, necromancy and pyromancy are all evil; if you seek Do-well, avoid them. I founded them to deceive the people.

The author goes at once to Clergy and his wife and is well received by them. Clergy says that Do-well is the active life, Do-better is charity and Do-best is the clergy with benefices and power to help and possessions to relieve the poor. Runners-about are evil; there are many such now, and the religious orders have become rich. 'I had thought kings and knights were best, but now I see that they are not.' Scripture interrupts with the declaration that kinghood and knighthood and riches help not to heaven, and only the poor can enter. '*Contra!*' says the author; 'Whoever believes and is baptised shall be saved.' Scripture replies that baptism saves only *in extremis* and only repentant heathen, whereas Christians must love and be charitable. Help, therefore, and do not harm, for God says, 'Slay not! for I shall punish every man for his misdeeds, unless Mercy intervenes.' The author objects that he is no nearer his quest, for whatever he may do will not alter his predestined end; Solomon did well and wisely and so did Aristotle, and both are in hell.

If I follow their words and works and am damned, I were unwise; the thief was saved before the patriarchs; and Magdalen, David, and Paul did ill, and yet are saved; Christ did not commend Clergy, but said, 'I will teach you what to say'; and Austin the Old said that the ignorant seize heaven sooner than the learned.

Passus XII opens with the reply of Clergy: 'I have tried to teach you Do-well, but you wish to cavil. If you would do as I say, I would help you.' Scripture scornfully replies, 'Tell him no more! Theology and David and Paul forbid it; and Christ refused to answer Pilate; tell him no more!' Clergy creeps into a cabin and draws the door, telling the author to go and do as he pleases, well or ill. But the author earnestly beseeches Scripture to direct him to Kind-Wit (Natural Intelligence), her cousin and confessor. She says he is with Life, and calls, as a guide, a young clerk, *Omnia-probate*. 'Go with Will,' she orders, 'to the borough *Quod-bonum-est-tenete* and show him my cousin's house.' They set out together.

And here, it seems to me, this author ceased. The remaining lines I believe to have been written by one John But. They relate that, ere the author reached the court *Quod-bonum-est-tenete*, he met with many wonders. First, as he passes through

Youth, he meets Hunger, who says that he dwells with Death, and seeks Life in order to kill him. The author wishes to accompany him, but, being too faint to walk, receives broken meats from Hunger, and eats too much. He next meets Fever, who dwells with Death and is going to attack Life. He proposes to accompany Fever; but Fever rejects his offer and advises him to do well and pray constantly.

Will knew that this speech was speedy; so he hastened and wrote what is written here and other works also of Piers the Plowman and many people besides. And, when this work was done, ere Will could espy, Death dealt him a dint and drove him to the earth; and he is now closed under clay, Christ have his soul! And so bade John But busily very often, when he saw these sayings alleged about James and Jerome and Job and others; and because he meddles with verse-making, he made this end. Now God save all Christians and especially king Richard and all lords that love him! and thou, Mary, Mother and Maiden, beseech thy Son to bring us to bliss!

Skeat originally ascribed to John But only the last twelve lines, beginning, 'And so bade John But.' It seems unlikely, however, that the 'end' which John But says he made refers to these lines only; certainly, it is not customary for scribes to use such a term for the supplications they add to a poem. And it is hard to conceive the motive of the author for finishing in this hasty fashion a poem which interested him, and which obviously had such immediate success. For these or similar reasons Skeat, later, admitted the possibility that the work of John But began seven lines earlier, with 'Will knew that this speech was speedy.' But the same reasoning applies to all the lines after l. 56, and an attentive reading of them will disclose several particulars at variance with the style or conceptions of the rest of the poem.

In closing our survey of the poems included in the A-text, we may note that, in their own day, they were not regarded as directed against the friars, for MS Rawl. Poet. 137 contains this inscription, 'in an old hand': *Hoc volumen conceditur ad usum fratrum minorum de observantia cantuariae.*

Let us turn now to the B-text. There is no reason to doubt the current view that it was written, in part at least, between June 1376 and June 1377. Tyrwhitt showed that the famous rat-parliament inserted in the prologue referred to the time between the death of the Black Prince and that of Edward III, and must have been written while men were anxious about the situation which then existed. The increased emphasis given to the pesti-

lences in B, also points, as Skeat suggests, to a time not long after the pestilence of 1376. To these may be added the allusion to the drought and famine of April 1370 (XIII, 269—271) as 'not long passed.' No one, perhaps, believes that the whole of the B-text was written within the year indicated; but it has been generally assumed that the additions in the prologue antedate the rest of the B-text. For this assumption there is no reason except that the prologue is at the beginning of the poem. Two considerations suggest, though they by no means prove, that B, in his additions and insertions, did not always follow the order of the original poem. In the first place, in X, 115 is a promise of a discussion which occurs in XII. Any one who studies carefully B's methods of composition will find it easier to believe that B had already written XII when he thus referred to it, than that he purposely postponed a discussion. In the second place, it is hard to believe that such a writer as B, after becoming so thoroughly excited over political affairs as he shows himself to be in his insertion in the prologue, would have written the 4036 lines of his continuation of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best without again discussing them.

The author of the B-text, as we have seen, had before him, when he began his work, the three visions of the A-text. Whether he regarded them as the work of a single author is not our present concern. In his reworking of the poems he practically disregarded passus XII and changed the preceding eleven passus by insertions and expansions. Minor verbal alterations he also made, but far fewer than is usually supposed. Many of those credited to him are to be found among the variant readings of the A-text, and were merely taken over unchanged from the MS of A used as the basis.

Of the nine principal insertions made in the first two visions, six may be regarded as mere elaborations of the A-text, namely, the changed version of the feoffment, the confessions of Wrath, Avarice, Glutton and Sloth and the plea of Repentance. The other three, including the rat-parliament and the jubilee passages, are among the most important expressions of the political views of B, and will be discussed below. The insertions in the third vision, though elaborations of the A-text, are more difficult to characterise as to theme, on account of a tendency to rambling and vagueness sometimes almost degenerating into incoherency. The worst of them is the third (IX, 59—121), which ranges over indiscretion, gluttony, the duty of holy church to

fools and orphans; the duty of charity, enforced by the example of the Jews; definitions of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best; waste of time and of speech; God's love of workers and of those faithful in wedlock. A few lines translated from this passage may serve to illustrate the author's mental processes, particularly his incapacity for organised or consecutive thinking, and his helpless subjection to the suggestions of the words he happens to use. They will also explain why students of these poems have found it impossible to give a really representative synopsis of his work. Let us begin with l. 88, immediately after the citation of the brotherly love of the Jews:

> The commons for their unkindness, I fear me, shall pay. Bishops shall be blamed because of beggars. He is worse than Judas that gives a jester silver, and bids the beggar go, because of his broken clothes. *Proditor est prelatus cum Iuda, qui patrimonium Christi mimis distribuit.* He does not well that does thus, and dreads not God Almighty, nor loves the saws of Solomon, who taught wisdom; *Initium sapientiae, timor Domini:* who dreads God does well; who dreads him for love and not for dread of vengeance does, therefore, the better; he does best that restrains himself by day and by night from wasting any speech or any space of time; *Qui offendit in uno in omnibus est reus.* Loss of time—Truth knows the sooth!—is most hated on earth of those that are in heaven; and, next, to waste speech, which is a sprig of grace and God's gleeman and a game of heaven; would never the faithful Father that His fiddle were untempered or His gleeman a rascal, a goer to taverns. To all true tidy men that desire to work Our Lord loves them and grants, loud or still, grace to go with them and procure their sustenance. *Inquirentes autem Dominum non minuentur omni bono.* True-wedded-living folk in this world is Do-well, etc.

As will be seen from this fairly representative passage, the author does not control or direct his own thought, but is at the mercy of any chance association of words and ideas; as Jusserand well says, *il est la victime et non le maître de sa pensée.*

In the series of visions forming B's continuation of the poems, the same qualities are manifest, and the same difficulty awaits the student who attempts a synopsis or outline of them. It is possible, indeed, to state briefly the general situation and movement of each vision, to say, *e.g.* that this presents the tree of Charity, and this the Samaritan; but the point of view is frequently and suddenly and unexpectedly shifted; topics alien to the main theme intrude because of the use of a suggestive word; speakers begin to expound views in harmony with their characters and end as mere mouthpieces of the author; *dramatis personae* that belong to one vision suddenly begin to speak and act in a later one as if they had been present all the time; others disappear even more mysteriously than they come.

Even the first of the added visions shows nearly all these peculiarities. At the beginning of passus XI, continuing the conversation of passus X, Scripture scorns the author and he begins to weep. Forgetting that he is already asleep and dreaming, the author represents himself as falling asleep and dreaming a new dream. Fortune ravished him alone into the land of Longing and showed him many marvels in a mirror called Mydlerd (*i.e.* the World). Following Fortune were two fair damsels, Concupiscencia-carnis and Covetyse-of-eyes, who comforted him, and promised him love and lordship. Age warned him, but Recklessness and Fauntelte (Childishness) made sport of the warning. Concupiscence ruled him, to the grief of Age and Holiness, and Covetyse comforted him forty-five years, telling him that, while Fortune was his friend, friars would love and absolve him. He followed her guidance till he forgot youth and ran into age, and Fortune was his foe. The friars forsook him. The reader expects to learn that this is because of his poverty, but, apparently, another idea has displaced this in the author's mind; for the reason given by him is that he said he would be buried at his parish church. For this, the friars held him a fool and loved him the less. He replied that they would not care where his body was buried provided they had his silver—a strange reply in view of the poverty into which he had fallen—and asked why they cared more to confess and to bury than to baptise, since baptism is needful for salvation. Lewte (Loyalty) looked upon him, and he loured. 'Why dost thou lour?' said Lewte. 'If I durst avow this dream among men?' 'Yea,' said he. 'They will cite "Judge not!"' said the author.

Of what service were Law if no one used it? It is lawful for laymen to tell the truth, except parsons and priests and prelates of holy church; it is not fitting for them to tell tales, though the tale were true, if it touched sin. What is known to everybody, why shouldst thou spare to declare; but be not the first to blame a fault. Though thou see evil, tell it not first; be sorry it were not amended. Thing that is secret, publish it never; neither laud it for love nor blame it for envy.

'He speaks truth,' said Scripture (who belongs not to this vision but to the preceding), and skipped on high and preached. 'But the subject she discussed, if laymen knew it, they would love it the less, I believe. This was her theme and her text: "Many were summoned to a feast, and, when they were come, the porter plucked in a few and let the rest go away."' Thereupon the author begins a long discussion with himself on predestination.

It is obvious that such writing as this defies analytical

presentation; and this is no isolated or rare instance. In certain passages where the author is following a narrative already organised for him, as in the rat-parliament of the prologue, or the account of the life of Christ in passus XVI, the rambling is less marked; but, if the narrative is long or elaborate, the author soon loses sight of the plan, as may be seen in the curious treatment, in passus XIX and XX, of the themes derived from *The Castle of Love*. In the instance last cited, the hopeless wandering occurs on so large a scale that it appears even in the synopses prepared by Skeat and others. Of the instances which disappear in synopsis, one of the most interesting is that of Activa-Vita, in passus XIII and XIV. Skeat's synopsis is as follows: 'Soon they meet with one Activa-Vita, who is a minstrel and seller of wafers. Patience instructs Activa-Vita, and declares that beggars shall have joy hereafter.' But the significant features are here omitted. Activa-Vita is the honest labourer, who provides bread for everybody, but, because he cannot please lords with lies and lewd jests, receives little reward. He is the friend and follower of Piers the Plowman. Yet, since he is Activa-Vita, in contact with the world, he is not spotless. The author therefore begins to tell us of the spots on Activa-Vita's coat, and, naturally, distributes them in the categories of the seven deadly sins. As soon as he enters upon this task he is perfectly helpless; he cannot control himself or his conceptions; and, consequently, he represents poor Activa-Vita as guilty of every one of the sins in its most wicked and vilest forms. The author of the C-text removed these passages to the confessions that followed the preaching of Conscience in the second vision, possibly, as Skeat thinks, in order to bring together passages of similar content and treatment, but, possibly, because such a contradiction in the character of Activa-Vita was too gross and glaring.

Recognising, then, the limitations with which every synopsis of the continuation by B must be received, we may say, briefly, that B adds seven visions, two and a fraction devoted to Do-well, two and a fraction to Do-better and two to Do-best. In the first (passus XI) there is no allegorical action; the dreamer meets various allegorical characters, such as Fortune, Recklessness, Nature and Reason, and hears them talk or talks himself either to them or to his readers. The subjects discussed are, as we have seen, very various; but chief among them are predestination, the value of poverty, incompetent priests and man's failure to follow reason as animals do. Following this, but not a vision, though it is dis-

tinguished from one only by the fact that the author is awake, is a long disquisition by Imaginative, containing views concerning the dangers and the value of learning and wealth very different from those expressed in A XI. The second vision begins with a dinner, given by Reason, at which are present the dreamer, Conscience, Clergy, Patience and a doctor of the church. Again there is no allegorical action; the dinner is only a device to bring together the disputants, who discuss theological subtleties. Following the dinner comes the interview with Activa-Vita described above. Conscience and Patience then instruct Activa-Vita to make amends by contrition and confession, and discuss at great length the benefits of poverty. The next vision is notable, though not unique, in containing a vision within a vision. In the first part (passus XV) Anima (also called Will, Reason, Love, Conscience, etc., an entirely different character from the Anima of A IX) discourses for 600 lines, mainly on knowledge, charity and the corruptions of the age due to the negligence of prelates; in the second part, when Anima, after describing the tree of Charity, says that it is under the care of Piers the Plowman, the dreamer swoons, for joy, into a dream, in which he sees Piers and the tree, and hears a long account of the fruits of the tree which gradually becomes a narrative of the birth and betrayal of Christ. At the close of this he wakes, and wanders about, seeking Piers, and meets with Abraham (or Faith), who expounds the Trinity; they are joined by Spes (Hope); and a Samaritan (identified with Jesus) cares for a wounded man whom neither Faith nor Hope will help. After this, the Samaritan expounds the Trinity, passing unintentionally to an exposition of mercy; and the dreamer wakes. In the next vision (passus XIX) he sees Jesus in the armour of Piers ready to joust with Death; but, instead of the jousting, we have an account of the crucifixion, the debate of the Four Daughters of God and the harrowing of hell. He wakes and writes his dream, and, immediately, sleeps again and dreams that Piers, painted all bloody and like to Christ, appears. Is it Jesus or Piers? Conscience tells him that these are the colours and coat-armour of Piers, but he that comes so bloody is Christ. A discussion ensues on the comparative merits of the names Christ and Jesus, followed by an account of the life of Christ. Piers is Peter (or the church), to whom are given four oxen (the evangelists) and four horses (the four fathers of the church) and four seeds to sow. A house, Unity, is built to store the grain, and is attacked by Pride and his host; but this is forgotten in the episodes of the brewer's refusal

to partake of the Sacrament, the vicar's attack on the cardinals and the justification by the king and lords of their own exactions. The dreamer wakes and encounters Need, who gives him instruction very similar to that of Conscience in the preceding dream. Falling asleep again, he has a vision of the attack of Antichrist and Pride and their hosts upon Unity, which insensibly becomes an attack by Death upon all mankind, varied by certain actions of Life, Fortune, Sloth, Despair, Avarice and the friar Flattery. Conscience, hard beset by Pride and Sloth, calls vainly for help to Contrition, and, seizing his staff, starts out on a search for Piers the Plowman. Whereupon the dreamer wakes.

Some scholars have regarded the poem as unfinished; others, as showing by the nature of its ending the pessimism of the author. It is true that it ends unsatisfactorily, and that one or more visions might well have been added; but it may be doubted whether the author ever could have written an ending that would have been artistically satisfactory. He had, as we have seen, no skill in composition, no control of his materials or his thought. The latter part of the poem is supposed to be devoted in regular order to Do-well, Do-better and Do-best; but it may be said, without injustice, that these subjects determine neither the nature of the main incidents nor the manner in which they are developed, and that what the author himself would doubtless have cited as the supreme expression of his view of Do-well, Do-better and Do-best occurs early in the vision of Do-well—I mean, of course, the famous *Disce, Doce, Dilige*, taught to Patience by his leman, Love. He could never have been sure of reserving to the end of his poem the subjects with which he intended to end, or of ceasing to write at the point at which he wished to cease. It remains curious, nevertheless, and, perhaps, significant, in view of the continual recurrence in the work of B of invectives against the corruptions of the age, that the poem does end with the triumph of Antichrist, and that there is no hint, as in Kirchmayer's *Pammachius*, of preparations for his defeat and the coming of an age of endless peace and good.

The reader who has been impressed with what has been said about the vagueness and lack of definite organisation and movement in B's work may be inclined to ask, What merits are his and what claim has he upon our interests? The reply is that his merits are very great indeed, being no less than those rated highest by previous students of the poems—Skeat, Jusserand, ten Brink, Henry Morley and a host of others. The very lack of

control, which is his most serious defect as an artist, serves to emphasise most convincingly his sincerity and emotional power, by the inevitableness with which, at every opportunity, he drifts back to the subjects that lie nearest his heart. Writing, as he did, without a definite plan and without power of self-direction, he touched, we may feel sure, not merely all subjects that were germane to his purpose, as a better artist would have done, but all that interested him deeply; and he touched most frequently those that interested him most. These subjects are, as is well known, the corruptions in the church, chiefly, perhaps, among the friars, but also, in no small measure, among the beneficed clergy; the dangers of riches and the excellence of poverty; the brotherhood of man; and the sovereign quality of love. To these should be added the idealisation of Piers the Plowman, elusive as are the forms which this idealisation often assumes. On the other hand, great as is the interest in political theory displayed by the author in the passages inserted in the prologue, this is not one of the subjects to which he constantly reverts; indeed, the only passage (XIX, 462—476) on this subject in the later passus touches it so lightly as to suggest that the author's interest in it at this time was very slight. The frequency with which subjects recur is, of course, not the only indication of the sincerity and depth of the author's interest; the vividness and power of expression are equally significant.

'Let some sudden emotion fill his soul,' says Jusserand, '.... and we shall wonder at the grandeur of his eloquence. Some of his simplest expressions are real *trouvailles*; he penetrates into the innermost recesses of our hearts, and then goes on his way, and leaves us pondering and thoughtful, filled with awe.'

Such are:

And mysbede (mistreat) nou3te thi bonde-men, the better may thow spede.
Thowgh he be thyn underlynge here, wel may happe in hevene,
That he worth (shall be) worthier sette, and with more blisse,
Than thow, bot thou do bette, and live as thow sulde;
For in charnel atte chirche cherles ben yvel to knowe,
Or a kni3te from a knave,—knowe this in thin herte. VI, 46 ff.

For alle are we Crystes creatures, and of his coffres riche,
And brethren as of o (one) blode, as wel beggares as erles. XI, 192 ff.

Pore peple, thi prisoneres, Lord, in the put (pit) of myschief,
Conforte tho creatures that moche care suffren,
Thorw derth, thorw drouth, alle her dayes here,
Wo in wynter tymes for wanting of clothes,
And in somer tyme selde (seldom) soupen to the fulle;
Comforte thi careful, Cryst, in thi ryche (kingdom)! XIV, 174 ff.

The date usually assigned to the C-text is 1393—8. The only evidence of any value is the passage IV, 203—210, in which the author warns the king of the results of his alienation of the confidence and affection of his people. This, Skeat takes to be an allusion to the situation after the quarrel between the king and the Londoners in 1392; and, consequently, he selects 1393 as the approximate date of the poem, though he admits that it may be later. Jusserand argues that this local quarrel, which was soon composed, does not suit the lines of the poem as well as does the general dissatisfaction of 1397—9; and he, therefore, suggests 1398—9 as the date. Jusserand's view seems the more probable; but, even so early as 1386, parliament sent to inform the king that

si rex...nec voluerit per jura regni et statuta ac laudibiles ordinationes cum salubri consilio dominorum et procerum regni gubernari et regulari, sed capitose in suis insanis consiliis propriam voluntatem suam singularem proterve exercere, extunc licitum est eis....regem de regali solio abrogare.
(Knighton, II, 219.)

Of the changes and additions made by C we can here say very little, mainly for the reason that they are numerous, and small, and not in pursuance of any well-defined plan. There are multitudinous alterations of single words or phrases, sometimes to secure better alliteration, sometimes to get rid of an archaic word, sometimes to modify an opinion, but often for no discoverable reason, and, occasionally, resulting in positive injury to the style or the thought. Certain passages of greater or less length are entirely or largely rewritten, rarely for any important modification of view; never, perhaps, with any betterment of style. At times, one is tempted to think they were rewritten for the mere sake of rewriting, but many whole pages are left practically untouched. Transpositions occur, sometimes resulting in improvement, sometimes in confusion. Excisions or omissions may be noted which seem to have been made because C did not approve of the sentiments of the omitted passages; but there are other omissions which cannot be accounted for on this ground or on that of any artistic intention. The additions are all of the nature of elaborations or expansions and insertions. Some of these have attracted much attention as giving information concerning the life and character of the dreamer or author; these will be dealt with below. Others give us more or less valuable hints of the views and interests of the writer; such are: the passage accusing priests of image worship and of forging miracles; an account of the fall of Lucifer, with speculations as to why he made his seat in the

north; an attack on regraters; the long confused passage[1] comparing the two kinds of meed to grammatical relations. Still others modify, in certain respects, the opinions expressed in the B-text. For example, XV, 30—32 indicates a belief in astrology out of harmony with the earlier condemnation of it; the attitude on free-will in XI, 51—55 and XVII, 158—182 suggests that, unlike B, and the continuator of A, C rejected the views of Bradwardine on grace and predestination; several passages on riches and the rich[2] show a certain eagerness to repudiate any such condemnation of the rich as is found in B; and, finally, not only is the striking passage in B[3], cited above, in regard to the poor, omitted, but, instead of the indiscriminate almsgiving insisted upon by B, C distinctly condemns it[4] and declares[5] that charity begins at home—'Help thi kynne, Crist bit (bids), for ther begynneth charite.'

On the whole, it may be said that the author of the C-text seems to have been a man of much learning, of true piety and of genuine interest in the welfare of the nation, but unimaginative, cautious and a very pronounced pedant.

The reader may desire a justification, as brief as possible, of the conclusion assumed throughout this chapter that the poems known under the title, *Piers the Plowman*, are not the work of a single author. So much of the necessary proof has already been furnished in the exposition of the different interests and methods and mental qualities displayed in the several parts of the work that little more will be necessary. The problem seems very simple: the differences pointed out—and others which cannot be discussed here—do exist; in the absence of any real reason to assume that all parts of this cluster of poems are the work of a single author, is it not more probable that several writers had a hand in it than that a single writer passed through the series of great and numerous changes necessary to account for the phenomena? To this question an affirmative answer will, I think, be given by any one who will take the trouble to examine separately the work of A (*i.e.* A, prol.—passus VIII), the continuator of A (A, IX—XII, 55), B and C—that is, to read carefully any passages of fifty or a hundred lines showing the work of each of these authors unmixed with lines from any of the others. In such an examination, besides the larger matters discussed throughout this chapter, the metre and the sentence structure will repay

[1] IV, 335. [2] XIII, 154—247; XIV, 26—100; XVIII, 21; XX, 232—246.
[3] XIV, 174—180. [4] X, 71—281. [5] XVIII, 58—71.

special attention. The system of scansion used will make no difference in the result; but that expounded by Luick will bring out the differences most clearly. It will be found that the writers differ in their conceptions of the requirements of alliterative verse, A being nearest to the types established by Luick, both in regard to stresses and secondary stresses and in regard to alliteration. This can be most easily tested by Luick's plan of considering separately the second-half-lines. Another interesting test is that of the use of the visual imagination. A presents to his own mind's eye and to that of his reader distinct visual images of figures, of groups of figures and of great masses of men; it is he who, as Jusserand says, 'excels in the difficult art of conveying the impression of a multitude.' A also, through his remarkable faculty of visual imagination, always preserves his point of view, and, when he moves his action beyond the limits of his original scene, causes his reader to follow the movement; best of all for the modern reader, he is able, by this faculty, to make his allegory vital and interesting; for, though the world long ago lost interest in personified abstractions, it has never ceased to care for significant symbolical action and utterance. On the other hand, B, though capable of phrases which show, perhaps, equal power of visualising detail, is incapable of visualising a group or of keeping his view steady enough to imagine and depict a developing action. The continuator of A and the reviser C show clearly that their knowledge of the world, their impressions of things, are derived in very slight measure, if at all, from visual sensations. These conclusions are not invalidated, but rather strengthened, by the fondness of B and C and the continuator of A for similes and illustrations, such as never appear in A.

Moreover, the number of instances should be noted in which B has misunderstood A or spoiled his picture, or in which C has done the same for B. Only a few examples can be given here. In the first place, B has such errors as these: in II, 21 ff. Lewte is introduced as the leman of the lady Holy Church and spoken of as feminine; in II, 25, False, instead of Wrong, is father of Meed, but is made to marry her later; in II, 74 ff. B does not understand that the feoffment covers precisely the provinces of the seven deadly sins, and, by elaborating the passage, spoils the unity of the intention; in II, 176, B has forgotten that the bishops are to accompany Meed to Westminster, and represents them as borne 'abrode in visytynge,' etc., etc. Worst of all, perhaps, B did not notice that, by the loss or displacement of a leaf be-

tween A, v, 235, 236, the confessions of Sloth and Robert the Robber had been absurdly run together; or that in A, vii, 71—74 the names of the wife and children of Piers, originally written in the margin opposite ll. 89—90 by some scribe, had been absurdly introduced into the text, to the interruption and confusion of the remarks of Piers in regard to his preparations for his journey. Of C's failures to understand B two instances will suffice. In the prologue, 11—16, B has taken over from A a vivid picture of the valley of the first vision:

> Thanne gan I to meten a merveilouse swevene,
> That I was in a wildernesse, wist I never where;
> As I beheld in-to the est an hiegh to the sonne,
> I seigh a toure on a toft, trielich ymaked;
> A depe dale benethe, a dongeon there-inne,
> With depe dyches and derke and dredful of sight.

C spoils the picture thus:

> And merveylously me mette, as ich may ȝow telle;
> Al the welthe of this worlde and the woo bothe,
> Wynkyng, as it were, wyterly ich saw hyt,
> Of tryuthe and of tricherye, of tresoun and of gyle,
> Al ich saw slepynge, as ich shal ȝow telle.
> Esteward ich byhulde, after the sonne,
> And sawe a toure, as ich trowede, truthe was ther-ynne;
> Westwarde ich waitede, in a whyle after,
> And sawe a deep dale; deth, as ich lyuede,
> Wonede in tho wones, and wyckede spiritus.

The man who wrote the former might, conceivably, in the decay of his faculties write a passage like the latter; but he could not, conceivably, have spoiled the former, if he had ever been able to write it. Again, in the famous rat-parliament, the rat 'renable of tonge' says:

> I have ysein segges in the cite of London
> Beren bi3es ful bri3te abouten here nekkes,
> And some colers of crafty werk; uncoupled thei wenden
> Bothe in wareine and in waste, where hem leve lyketh;
> And otherwhile thei aren elles-where, as I here telle.
> Were there a belle on here bei3, bi Ihesu, as me thynketh,
> Men my3te wite where thei went, and awei renne!
>
> B, *Prol.* 160—6.

Clearly the 'segges' he has seen wearing collars about their necks in warren and in waste are dogs. C, curiously enough, supposed them to be men:

> Ich have yseie grete syres in cytees and in tounes
> Bere by3es of bry3t gold al aboute hure neckes,
> And colers of crafty werke, bothe kny3tes and squiers.
> Were ther a belle on hure by3e, by Iesus, as me thynketh,
> Men my3te wite wher thei wenten, and hure wey roume!

Other misunderstandings of equal significance exist in considerable number; these must suffice for the present. I may add that a careful study of the MSS will show that between A, B and C there exist dialectical differences incompatible with the supposition of a single author. This can be easily tested in the case of the pronouns and the verb *are*.

With the recognition that the poems are the work of several authors, the questions concerning the character and name of the author assume a new aspect. It is readily seen that the supposed autobiographical details, given mainly by B and C, are, as Jack conclusively proved several years ago, not genuine, but mere parts of the fiction. Were any confirmation of his results needed, it might be found in the fact that the author gives the names of his wife and daughter as Kitte and Kalote. Kitte, if alone, might not arouse suspicion, but, when it is joined with Kalote (usually spelled 'callet'), there can be no doubt that both are used as typical names of lewd women, and are, therefore, not to be taken literally as the names of the author's wife and daughter. The picture of the dreamer, begun by A in prologue, 2, continued by the continuator in IX, 1 and elaborated by B and C, is only a poetical device, interesting in itself but not significant of the character or social position of any of these authors. Long Will, the dreamer, is, obviously, as much a creation of the muse as is Piers the Plowman.

What shall we say of the name, William Langland, so long connected with the poems? One MS of the C-text has a note in a fifteenth century hand (but not early):

Memorandum, quod Stacy de Rokayle, pater Willielmi de Langlond, qui Stacius fuit generosus et morabatur in Schiptone under Whicwode, tenens domini le Spenser in comitatu Oxon., qui praedictus Willielmus fecit librum qui vocatur Perys Ploughman.

Another fifteenth century note in a MS of the B-text says: 'Robert or William langland made pers ploughman.' And three MSS of the C-text (one, not later than 1427) give the author's name as 'Willelmus W.' Skeat is doubtless right in his suggestion that the name Robert arose from a misreading of C, XI, 1; but he and Jusserand find in B, XV, 148:

I have lyved in londe, quod I, my name is long wille,

confirmation of the first note quoted above. It is possible, however, that this is really the source of the name. Curiously enough, this line is omitted by C, either because he wished to suppress it or because he did not regard it as significant. Furthermore,

Pearson showed pretty conclusively that, if the author was the son of Stacy de Rokayle (or Rokesle) of Shipton-under-Wychwood, his name, if resembling Langland at all, would have been Langley. If this were the case, Willelmus W. might, obviously, mean William of Wychwood, as Morley suggested, and be merely an alternative designation of William Langley—a case similar to that of the Robertus Langelye, alias Robertus Parterick, *capellanus*, who died in 19 Richard II, possessed of a messuage and four shops in the Flesh-shambles, a tenement in the Old Fish-market and an interest in a tenement in Staining-lane, and who may, conceivably, have had some sort of connection with the poems. It is possible, of course, that these early notices contain a genuine, even if confused, record of one or more of the men concerned in the composition of these poems. One thing, alone, is clear, that Will is the name given to the figure of the dreamer by four, and, possibly, all five, of the writers; but it is not entirely certain that A really meant to give him a name. Henry Bradley has, in a private letter, called my attention to certain facts which suggest that Will may have been a conventional name in alliterative poetry.

If we cannot be entirely certain of the name of any of these writers except John But, can we determine the social position of any of them? John But was, doubtless, a scribe, or a minstrel like the author of *Wynnere and Wastoure*. B, C and the continuator of A seem, from their knowledge and theological interests, to have been clerics, and, from their criticisms of monks and friars, to have been of the secular clergy. C seems inclined to tone down criticisms of bishops and the higher clergy, and is a better scholar than either the continuator of A (who translated *non mecaberis* by 'slay not' and *tabescebam* by 'I said nothing') or B (who accepted without comment the former of these errors). A, as has been shown already, exempts from his satire no order of society except monks, and may himself have been one; but, as he exhibits no special theological knowledge or interests, he may have been a layman.

In one of the MSS of the B-text occurs a fragment of a poem which is usually associated with *Piers the Plowman*. It has no title in the MS and was called by its first editor, Thomas Wright, *A Poem on the Deposition of Richard II*; but Skeat, when he re-edited it in 1873 and 1886, objected to this title as being

inaccurate, and re-named it *Richard the Redeless*, from the first words of passus I. Henry Bradley has recently called attention to the fact that it was known to Nicholas Brigham in the first part of the sixteenth century as *Mum, Sothsegger* (*i.e.* Hush, Truthteller). There can be no doubt that this was, as Bradley suggests, the ancient title; for it is not such a title as would have been chosen either by Brigham or by Bale, who records it. The copy seen by Brigham, as it had a title, cannot have been the fragmentary copy that is now the only one known to us. Wright regarded the poem as an imitation of *Piers the Plowman*; Skeat undertook to prove, on the basis of diction, dialect, metre, statements in the text itself, etc., that it was the work of the same author. But claims of authorship made in these poems are not conclusive, as will be seen in the discussion of the *Ploughman's Tale*; and the resemblances in external form, in dialect, in versification, etc., on which Skeat relies, are not greater than might be expected of an imitator, while there are such numerous and striking differences in diction, versification, sentence structure and processes of thought from every part of *Piers the Plowman*, that identity of authorship seems out of the question. The poem, as has been said, is a fragment; and Skeat thinks that it may have been left unfinished by the author in consequence of the deposition of Richard. But the MS in which it is found is not the original, but a copy; and the prologue seems to imply that the poem had been completed when the prologue was written. The author professes to be a loyal subject and friendly adviser of Richard, but the tone of the poem itself is strongly partisan to Henry of Lancaster, and, curiously enough, nearly all the remarks in regard to Richard imply that his rule was entirely at an end. This latter fact is, of course, not incompatible with Skeat's view that the poem was written between the capture and the formal deposition of Richard, *i.e.* between 18 August and 20 September 1399. As to the form and contents of the poem, it is not a vision, but consists of a prologue, reciting the circumstances of its composition, and three passus and part of a fourth, setting forth the errors and wrongs of Richard's rule. Passus I is devoted to the misdeeds of his favourites. Passus II censures the crimes of his retainers (the White Harts) against the people, and his own folly in failing to cherish such men as Westmoreland (the Greyhound), while Henry of Lancaster (the Eagle) was strengthening his party. Passus III relates the unnaturalness of the White Harts in attacking the Colt, the Horse, the Swan and the Bear,

with the return of the Eagle for vengeance, and then digresses into an attack upon the luxury and unwisdom of Richard's youthful counsellors. Passus IV continues the attack upon the extravagance of the court, and bitterly condemns the corrupt parliament of 1397 for its venality and cowardice.

The influence of *Piers the Plowman* was wide-spread and long-continued. There had been many satires on the abuses of the time (see Wright's *Political Poems* and *Political Songs and Poems*), some of them far bitterer than any part of these poems, but none equal in learning, in literary skill and, above all, none that presented a figure so captivating to the imagination as the figure of the Ploughman. From the evidence accessible to us it would seem that this popularity was due, in large measure, to the B-text, or, at least, dated from the time of its appearance, though, according to my view, the B-text itself and the continuation of A were due to the impressiveness of the first two visions of the A-text.

Before discussing the phenomena certainly due to the influence of these poems, we must devote a few lines to two interesting but doubtful cases. In 1897, Gollancz edited for the Roxburghe Club two important alliterative poems, *The Parlement of the Thre Ages* and *Wynnere and Wastoure*, both of which begin in a manner suggestive of the beginning of *Piers the Plowman*, and both of which contain several lines closely resembling lines in the B-text of that poem. The lines in question seem, from their better relation to the context, to belong originally to *Piers the Plowman* and to have been copied from it by the other poems; if there were no other evidence, these poems would, doubtless, be placed among those suggested by it; but there is other evidence. *Wynnere and Wastoure* contains two allusions that seem to fix its date at *c.* 1350, and *The Parlement* seems to be by the same author. The two allusions are to the twenty-fifth year of Edward III (l. 206), and to William de Shareshull as chief baron of the exchequer (l. 317). The conclusion is, apparently, inevitable that the imitation is on the part of *Piers the Plowman*. In *The Parlement* the author goes into the woods to hunt, kills a deer and hides it. Then, falling asleep, he sees in a vision three men, Youth, Middle-Age and Age, clad, respectively, in green, grey and black, who dispute concerning the advantages and disadvantages of the ages they represent. Age relates the histories of the Nine Worthies,

and declares that all is vanity. He hears the bugle of Death summoning him, and the author wakes. In *Wynnere and Wastoure* the author, a wandering minstrel, after a prologue bewailing the degeneracy of the times and the small respect paid to the author of a romance, tells how

> Als I went in the weste wandrynge myn one,
> Bi a bonke of a bourne bryghte was the sonne.
> . . . . . .
> I layde myn hede one an hill ane hawthorne besyde.
> . . . . . .
> And I was swythe in a sweven sweped belyve;
> Methoghte I was in a werlde, I ne wiste in whate ende.

He saw two armies ready to fight; and

> At the creste of a cliffe a caban was rered,

ornamented with the colours and motto of the order of the Garter, in which was the king, whose permission to fight was awaited. The king forbade them to fight and summoned the leaders before him. There is a brilliant description of the embattled hosts. The two leaders are Wynnere and Wastoure, who accuse each other before the king of having caused the distress of the kingdom. The end of the poem is missing. Both poems are of considerable power and interest in themselves, and are even more significant as suggesting, what is often forgotten, that the fourteenth century was a period of great and wide-spread intellectual activity, and that poetical ability was not rare.

Not in the metre of *Piers the Plowman*, but none the less significant of the powerful hold which the figure of the Plowman obtained upon the English people, are the doggerel letters of the insurgents of 1381, given by Walsingham and Knighton, and reprinted by Maurice and Trevelyan. Trevelyan makes a suggestion which has doubtless occurred independently to many others, that '*Piers Plowman* may perhaps be only one characteristic fragment of a medieval folk-lore of allegory, which expressed for generations the faith and aspirations of the English peasant, but of which Langland's great poem alone has survived.' One would like to believe this; but the mention of 'do well and better' in the same letter with Piers Plowman makes it practically certain that the writer had in mind the poems known to us and not merely a traditional allegory; though it may well be that Piers the Plowman belonged to ancient popular tradition.

Next in order of time was, doubtless, the remarkable poem called *Peres the Ploughmans Crede*, which Skeat assigns to 'not

long after the latter part of 1393.' The versification is imitated from *Piers the Plowman*, and the theme, as well as the title, was clearly suggested by it. It is, however, not a vision, but an account of the author's search for some one to teach him his creed. He visits each of the orders of friars. Each abuses the rest and praises his own order, urging the inquirer to contribute to it and trouble himself no more about his creed. But he sees too much of their worldliness and wickedness, and refuses. At last, he meets a plain, honest ploughman, who delivers a long and bitter attack upon friars of all orders, and, finally, teaches the inquirer the much desired creed. The poem is notable, not only for the vigour of its satire, but also for the author's remarkable power of description.

With the *Crede* is often associated the long poem known as *The Ploughman's Tale*. This was first printed, in 1542 or 1535, in Chaucer's works and assigned to the Ploughman. That it was not written by Chaucer has long been known, but, until recently, it has been supposed to be by the author of the *Crede*. The poem, though containing much alliteration, is not in alliterative verse, but in rimed stanzas, and is entirely different in style from the *Crede*. The differences are such as indicate that it could not have been written by the author of that poem. It has recently been proved by Henry Bradley, that very considerable parts of the poem, including practically all the imitations of the *Crede*, were written in the sixteenth century. These passages were also independently recognised as interpolations by York Powell and this was communicated privately to Skeat, who now accepts Bradley's conclusions. Bradley thinks that the poem may contain some genuine stanzas of a Lollard poem of the fourteenth century, but that it underwent two successive expansions in the sixteenth century, both with the object of adapting it to contemporary controversy. The relation of even the fourteenth century portion to *Piers the Plowman* is very remote.

Three pieces belonging to the Wyclifite controversy, which also bear a more or less remote relation to *Piers the Plowman*, are ascribed by their editor, Thomas Wright, to 1401, and by Skeat, who re-edited the first of them, to 1402. The first of them, called *Jacke Upland*, is a violent attack upon the friars by one of the Wyclifite party. By John Bale, who rejected as wrong the attribution of it to Chaucer, it is, with equal absurdity, attributed to Wyclif himself. There is some alliteration in the piece, which made Wright suppose it to have been originally written in

alliterative verse. Skeat denies that it was ever intended as verse, and he seems to be right in this, though his repudiation of Wright's suggestion that our copy of the piece is corrupt is hardly borne out by the evidence. The second piece, *The Reply of Friar Daw Thopias*, is a vigorous and rather skilful answer to *Jacke Upland*. The author, himself a friar, is not content to remain on the defensive, but tries to shift the issue by attacking the Lollards. According to the *explicit* of the MS the author was John Walsingham, who is stated by Bale to have been a Carmelite. This piece is in very rude alliterative verse. *The Rejoinder of Jacke Upland*, which is preserved in the same MS with the *Reply*, is of the same general character as *Jacke Upland*, though, perhaps through the influence of the *Reply*, it contains a good deal more alliteration. None of these pieces has any poetical merit, but all are vigorous and interesting examples of the popular religious controversy of the day.

Very evidently due to the influence of *Piers the Plowman* is a short alliterative poem of 144 lines, addressed, apparently, to Henry V in 1415, and called by Skeat, its editor, *The Crowned King*. In a vision the author looks down into a deep dale, where he sees a multitude of people and hears a crowned king ask his commons for a subsidy for his wars; to the king a clerk kneels, and, having obtained leave to speak, urges him to cherish his people and beware of evil counsellors and of avarice. The piece is sensible and well written, but is entirely lacking in special poetical quality.

Of entirely uncertain date is an interesting allegorical poem called *Death and Liffe*, preserved in the Percy Folio MS. Its relation to *Piers the Plowman* is obvious and unmistakable. In a vision, closely modelled on the vision of the prologue, the poet witnesses a strife between the lovely lady Dame Life and the foul freke Dame Death, which was clearly suggested by the 'Vita de Do-best' of *Piers the Plowman*. In spite of its large indebtedness to the earlier poem, it is a work of no little originality and power.

In the same priceless MS is preserved another alliterative poem, which Skeat regards as the work of the author of *Death and Liffe*. It is called *The Scotish Feilde* and is, in the main, an account of the battle of Flodden. The author, who describes himself as 'a gentleman, by Jesu' who had his 'bidding place' 'at Bagily' (*i.e.* at Baggily Hall, Cheshire), was an ardent adherent of the Stanleys and wrote for the specific purpose of

celebrating their glorious exploits at Bosworth Field and at Flodden. The poem seems to have been written shortly after Flodden, and, perhaps, rewritten or revised later. That the author of this poem, spirited chronicle though it be, was capable of the excellences of *Death and Life*, is hard to believe; the resemblances between the poems seem entirely superficial and due to the fact that they had a common model.

The influence of *Piers the Plowman* lasted, as we have seen, well into the sixteenth century; indeed, interest in both the poem and its central figure was greatly quickened by the supposed relations between it and Wyclifism. The name or the figure of the Ploughman appears in innumerable poems and prose writings, and allusions of all sorts are very common. Skeat has given a list of the most important of these in the fourth volume of his edition of *Piers Plowman* for the Early English Text Society.

We are accustomed to regard the fourteenth century as, on the whole, a dark epoch in the history of England—an epoch when the corruptions and injustices and ignorance of the Middle Ages were piling themselves ever higher and higher; when the Black Death, having devoured half the population of city and hamlet, was still hovering visibly like a gaunt and terrible vulture over the affrighted country; when noblemen and gentry heard in indignant bewilderment the sullen murmur of peasants awakening into consciousness through pain, with now and then a shriller cry for vengeance and a sort of blind justice; an epoch when intellectual life was dead or dying, not only in the universities, but throughout the land. Against this dark background we seemed to see only two bright figures, that of Chaucer, strangely kindled to radiance by momentary contact with the renascence, and that of Wyclif, no less strange and solitary, striving to light the torch of reformation, which, hastily muffled by those in authority, smouldered and sparkled fitfully a hundred years before it burst into blaze. With them, but farther in the background, scarcely distinguishable, indeed, from the dark figures among which he moved, was dimly discerned a gaunt dreamer, clothed in the dull grey russet of a poor shepherd, now watching with lustreless but seeing eye the follies and corruptions and oppressions of the great city, now driven into the wilderness by the passionate protests of his aching heart, but ever shaping into crude, formless but powerful visions images of the wrongs and oppressions which he hated and of the growing hope which, from time to time, was revealed to his eager eyes.

That the Black Death was a horrible reality the statistics of its ravages prove only too well; that there was injustice and misery, ignorance and intellectual and spiritual darkness, is only too true; but the more intimately we learn to know the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the more clearly do we see, not only Grosseteste and Ockham and Richard of Armagh, but a host of forgotten or nameless men who battled for justice, and kindliness, and intellectual and spiritual light; and our study of the *Piers the Plowman* cluster of poems has shown us that that confused voice and that mighty vision were the voice and vision, not of one lonely, despised wanderer, but of many men, who, though of diverse tempers and gifts, cherished the same enthusiasm for righteousness and hate for evil.

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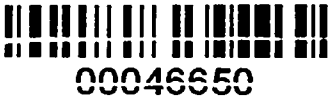

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